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ABSTRACT

Civil strife and deteriorating economic conditions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala have caused hundreds of thousands of refugees to seek asylum and assistance in other Central American countries, Mexico, and the United States. While international organizations and some asylum country governments provide the basic needs of refugees who seek assistance, most refugees remain outside assistance programs. This report discusses the policies of and extent of assistance given to Central American refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, refugees' living conditions and prospects in asylum countries, and U.S. and asylum government policies toward refugees. It also examines (1) the link between assistance and asylum opportunities available to refugees in the region and the possible future migration of refugees to the United States, and (2) the potential impact of such migration. (Author)

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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

# Report To The Congress Of The United States

SEP 11 1984

OF THE UNITED STATES

# Central American Refugees: Regional Conditions and Prospects and Potential Impact on the United States

Civil strife and deteriorating economic conditions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala have caused hundreds of thousands of refugees to seek asylum and assistance in other Central American countries, Mexico and the United States. While international organizations and some asylum country governments provide the basic material needs of refugees who seek assistance most refugees remain outside assistance programs.

This report discusses the policies of and extent of assistance given to Central American refugees by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, refugees' living conditions and prospects in asylum countries, and U.S. and asylum government policies toward refugees. It also examines (1) the link between assistance and asylum opportunities available to refugees in the region and the possible future migration of refugees to the United States and (2) the potential impact of such migration.

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON D.C. 20548

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To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This report describes the living conditions of refugees who have fled El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, their prospects for obtaining asylum and assistance in other Central American countries and Mexico, and the potential impact of their possible migration to the United States. This review was part of our continuous evaluation of U.S. and international refugee assistance programs.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; Secretary, Department of State; Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services; and the Attorney General, Department of Justice.

Charles A. Bowsher

Comptroller General
of the United States

COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

# CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES: REGIONAL CONDITIONS AND PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE UNITED STATES

## D I G E S T


Economic problems followed by civil strife and violence in Central America have caused hundreds of thousands of people in the region to seek asylum in neighboring countries. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) considers over 300,000 of them refugees. Many arrive in asylum countries needing emergency help and ongoing care and protection. Caring for and resettling these refugees present Central American countries, Mexico, the United States, and the rest of the international community with major assistance and social problems.

Conditions in the region raise concerns about the adequacy and management of refugee assistance programs in Central America and Mexico and the programs' relationship to the migration of Central Americans to the United States. GAO's review focused on these issues. In assessing the U.S.-supported UNHCR programs in 1983, GAO concentrated on refugee assistance programs in those countries where most Central American refugees have sought asylum and assistance and where asylum governments and international organizations provided such assistance--Costa Rica, Honduras, and Mexico. GAO also studied the refugee and immigration policies of the asylum country governments and the United States and collected and summarized information on the potential impact in this country of the continuing large numbers of migrants from Central America. (See ch.2.)

In this report, the term "refugee" will be used when referring to those Central Americans the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees considers to be refugees. Both the High Commissioner's Office criteria for determining refugee status and the Departments of State and Justice comments concerning GAO's use of the term are included in appendix II.


### U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The United States depends on international organizations to assist Central American

refugees and supports the regional assistance programs of the UNHCR. United States policy supports refugee resettlement within the region rather than in the United States. Historically, this policy has been facilitated by the tradition of countries in the region to grant refuge and assistance to most asylum seekers.

The Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs implements U.S. refugee policies and funds refugee programs. The Bureau is also responsible for monitoring, pursuing U.S. interests in, and pressing for improvements in these programs. Virtually all U.S. funds for Central American refugee programs are channeled through UNHCR. The $11 million provided by the United States in fiscal year 1984 accounted for about one-third of UNHCR's programs in Central America. (See ch.2.)

UNHCR is responsible for providing refugees' basic needs (i.e., food, shelter, and medical and educational assistance) and promoting lasting solutions to refugee problems--either by making them self-sufficient, resettling them in the asylum countries or elsewhere, or repatriating them. (See ch.2.)

## BASIC NEEDS OF MOST ENCAMPED REFUGEES MET

UNHCR reported in December 1983 that Central American refugees numbered about 322,000, mostly from El Salvador (80 percent), Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Only about one-fourth of them, however, were receiving assistance, mostly in camps and settlements in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Mexico. (See ch.3.)

GAO found that the basic needs of those refugees assisted in Honduras and Costa Rica were being met. Overall, during 1983 material assistance to and protection of refugees improved due, in part, to improved UNHCR working relationships with asylum governments. (See ch. 3.)

GAO was unable to accurately determine if refugees in Mexico were being adequately assisted and protected due to Mexican government policies restricting U.S. government and international organizations' access to the settlements. (See ch.3.)

## LIMITED ASYLUM COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

While conditions at refugee camps and settlements are improving, asylum country policies and program restrictions continue to limit the overall effectiveness of international assistance efforts. Poor economic conditions and political concerns throughout Central America cause difficulties in providing assistance and resettlement opportunities to refugees in asylum countries. As a result, the extent of asylum country support and resettlement assistance for the major refugee groups varies greatly. For example, in Honduras, Nicaraguan Miskito Indian refugees are being resettled permanently and assisted to become self-sufficient, whereas Salvadoran refugees are confined to their camps and not allowed to seek employment. Furthermore, Salvadorans do not have sufficient land on which to become agriculturally self-sufficient and thereby reduce UNHCR and other program support costs. To improve refugee safety and increase their self-sufficiency, UNHCR supports Honduran government efforts to move the Salvadoran refugee camps away from the border. The government, however, has not agreed to ease existing movement and employment restrictions on the refugees and specific conditions for the new camps have not been established. UNHCR believes that easing of such restrictions must be addressed by the government before such a move takes place. (See ch.3.)

In Costa Rica, a resettlement program for Salvadorans has been costly and encountered numerous problems. The government also has not allotted land for new Nicaraguan refugee resettlement sites and employment restrictions on all refugees continue to hinder self-sufficiency projects. (See ch.3.)

Until 1983, Mexico permitted several thousand Salvadorans to resettle in the country and, through UNHCR, provided them material assistance. The government no longer views Salvadorans as refugees and does not provide them such assistance. Further, increasingly restrictive Mexican policies concerning refugees, including limiting UNHCR and others access to the Guatemalan settlements, make it difficult for the international community to assess the effectiveness of these assistance programs. (See ch.3.)

## SALVADORANS' PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT AND ASSISTANCE ARE LIMITED

UNHCR has estimated that more than two hundred thousand Salvadoran refugees have fled their country in the past few years. Only about 31,000 are being assisted in Central American countries. (See app. I.)

According to UNHCR and U.S. government officials working in the region, continued violence and poor economic conditions in El Salvador will likely cause more to flee.Limited asylum country resettlement opportunities and assistance throughout the region may cause them to migrate to the United States in search of better opportunities and improved economic conditions. (See ch.3.)

## IMPACT OF CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES IS NOT CLEAR

The United States government does not know or have the means to accurately determine the number of Central Americans entering the country. Furthermore, the potential economic and social impact of a large number of refugees and/or illegal immigrants from Central America on the United States is unclear. Their impact, however, will depend greatly on the legal status and rights given them by the U.S. government--as refugees, entrants or illegal aliens. (See ch.4.)

In recent years the cost of assisting and resettling refugees from around the world in the United States has been considered high. For example, the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs estimated that in fiscal years 1981 and 1982, the cost of receiving, processing, and assisting refugees resettled in the United States was about $3 billion. Most of these costs were borne by the federal government. (See ch. 4.)

There is neither a consensus, nor sufficient data, on the cost and impact of illegal immigrants on the United States. While they do not present any formal resettlement costs, concern for their presence is noted in states and local communities where they compete for jobs; use health care and public education facilities; and in some areas, create social problems. (See ch.4.)

## U.S. EMERGENCY IMMIGRATION PLANS

The plan to deal with sudden large-scale illegal immigration into the United States currently centers on controlling such immigration into southern Florida. That plan has little relationship to controlling illegal immigration across the United States-Mexico border where over 1,800 Central Americans and tens of thousands of Mexicans are being apprehended monthly. According to Immigration and Naturalization Service officials, another plan to control illegal migration across the U.S. southern border is being developed. (See ch. 4.)

GAO believes that large numbers of persons fleeing Central American countries and seeking asylum elsewhere in the region are not receiving the refuge and assistance traditionally available there. This is due, in part, to the large number of refugees and other migrants requiring assistance, asylum countries' serious economic difficulties limiting the amount of assistance they can provide, and certain countries' political decisions to limit assistance and asylum for refugees. Therefore, the United States must be better prepared to deal with the continued large number of Central Americans trying to enter this country illegally. (See ch.4.)

## AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO EVALUATION

The Departments of State, Justice, and Health and Human Services commented on a draft of this report. The agencies' comments on specific sections of the draft are incorporated in the report where appropriate. (See pp. 43-56.)

The Department of State commented that the draft report was, in general, a good overview of the status of refugee populations in the Central American region. State believes that the tradition of regional hospitality and asylum toward refugees continues to be viable in Central America, but is directly dependent on the willingness of the international community to bear the cost of assistance. GAO's work shows, however, that the extent of regional resettlement opportunities and assistance in the region is currently insufficient due to the number of refugees, and asylum countries' economic problems and political concerns. (See ch.3.)



Tear Sheet

The Department of Health and Human Services commented that the report provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the Central American refugee problem but that it lacked an indepth discussion of the domestic impact on the United States. GAO noted that the lack of sufficient information and other data to accurately quantify the full domestic impact of Central American immigrants precluded such a discussion. (See ch.4.)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AID | Agency for International Development |
| CARITAS | Catholic Episcopal Conference |
| GAO | General Accounting Office |
| HHS | Health and Human Services |
| INS | Immigration and Naturalization Service |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### MAJOR REFUGEE FLOWS AND SETTLEMENTS (DECEMBER 1983)

**LEGEND**

- ● Refugee Camp / Settlement (Refugees' Nationality)
- ★ Capital City

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of Central Americans, like people from other parts of the world, are fleeing their countries in search of safety and improved living conditions. Some of them are called refugees, others migrants.[1] They are uprooted from their homes by such political and socioeconomic factors as repressive governments, civil strife, poverty, high unemployment and inflation, inadequate health care and education, and minimal opportunities for personal and social development. According to U.S. and international estimates, most have migrated toward North America. Their flight, resulting from these various factors which transcend national and international migration and asylum laws, presents the United States, other regional countries, and the rest of the international community with major humanitarian, resettlement and political problems.

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua are the major refugee-generating countries. Historically, the lure of economic opportunities elsewhere has spurred migration from these countries. During the past several years, however, civil strife has accelerated that movement. As one researcher points out: " . . . large population(s) driven by political forces from their countries followed the familiar paths of an already established pattern of economic migration." These refugees do not fit a specific profile, although most are people from rural areas with few technical skills. The majority of those seeking asylum and assistance in neighboring countries are women and children. Those that migrate further include a larger number of young unaccompanied men. The prospects for the early return of these refugees to their countries of origin are not favorable.

Central American countries have historically provided asylum to refugees in relatively small numbers and who were mainly educated and from middle and upper classes. Common heritage, language and culture have facilitated this. However, the region's worsening socioeconomic problems, the recent large refugee flows, and the refugees unwillingness to return home have severely strained the ability and willingness of countries to continue providing asylum and assistance. Asylum countries now perceive refugees as creating numerous domestic problems and contributing to internal political tensions. Most of the documented (officially recorded) refugees are being assisted through

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[1]In this report, the term "refugee" will be used, unless otherwise noted, when referring to those Central Americans the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees considers to be refugees. Both the High Commissioner's Office criteria for determining refugee status and the Departments of State and Justice comments concerning our use of the term are included in Appendix II.

government supported programs funded largely by the international community but are permitted only to resettle temporarily and denied work permits. As civil wars, economic problems, and limited resettlement opportunities in the region continue to reduce asylum opportunities, many Central Americans tend to migrate to, and impact on, the United States.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED REFUGEES

The international community, including the United States, continues to provide increasing amounts of assistance to refugees in Central America and Mexico. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the primary international organization responsible for assisting and protecting refugees worldwide, as well as seeking and developing lasting solutions to their plight. At the request of asylum country governments, UNHCR provides various types of assistance, including (1) initial emergency relief, (2) ongoing longer term care and maintenance, and (3) efforts to make refugees self-sufficient.

UNHCR funding of assistance programs increased from about $21.6 million in 1982 to $25.4 million in 1984--the United States contributed about one-third of these amounts. Most of this assistance provides relief and ongoing care of refugees in settlements in Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua. The International Committee for the Red Cross, the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, and numerous church and private voluntary organizations also provide assistance. Host government contributions are primarily in the form of land for temporary settlements and some medical and education support.

## U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

U.S. refugee policy emphasizes providing protection, along with care, resettlement and repatriation assistance for refugees in Central America rather than promoting resettlement opportunities for them in the United States. U.S. policy also emphasizes that the political, financial, and social burdens of refugee assistance be shared universally by the international community.

The U.S. support efforts include providing lifesaving assistance and ongoing care in countries where refugees first seek asylum and promoting voluntary repatriation when possible. The United States also supports programs designed to encourage and maintain the tradition of the Central American countries to readily provide asylum to refugees. The administration believes that because of the long-standing tradition in the region of granting refuge to political exiles, there is no need for the United States to provide either asylum or resettlement for large numbers of these refugees. As a result, for fiscal year 1984, the U.S. refugee admissions ceiling was reduced to 1,000 (down from 2,000 the previous 2 years) for refugees from the Latin

American and Caribbean regions. Until recently, however, no Central American had been admitted to the United States as a refugee. In the first half of fiscal year 1984, 93 Salvadorans were admitted as refugees. Though U.S. policy supports regional resettlement efforts and assumes the existence of sufficient regional resettlement opportunities, the United States has reported that up to 500,000 Central Americans have entered the United States illegally in recent years.

## OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

We reviewed the Department of State's management and implementation of U.S. refugee policies and programs and its work with international organizations, primarily UNHCR, responsible for assisting refugees in Central America and Mexico. We examined State's monitoring of U.S. funds and resources devoted to relief of Central American refugees. We examined matters including (1) care and protection of refugees, (2) promotion of refugees self-sufficiency in countries of asylum, and (3) encouragement of voluntary repatriation.

We also collected and summarized information on the potential impact on the United States of large numbers of Central Americans migrating to this country and the ability of the U.S. government to respond to such immigration. Information on the domestic impact of undocumented or illegal aliens was obtained from previous GAO reports[2] and other reports and data and discussions with officials from the Departments of State and Justice, the Office of Management and Budget, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and private organizations.

We did not question or assess the U.S. policy of depending primarily on international organizations to implement U.S. refugee assistance in Central America. Furthermore, we determined neither the extent to which such a policy minimized overall U.S. costs and direct bilateral involvement in providing such assistance, nor if the international community equitably shared the costs of such assistance.

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[2] The Indochinese Exodus: A Humanitarian Dilemma, (April 24, 1979; ID-79-20)
Illegal Aliens: Estimating Their Impact on the United States, (March 14, 1980; PAD-80-22)
Prospects Dim for Effectively Enforcing Immigration Laws, (November 5, 1980; GGD-81-4)
Problems and Options in Estimating the Size of the Illegal Alien Population, (September 24, 1982; GAO/IPE-82-9)
International Assistance to Refugees in Africa can be Improved, (December 29, 1982; GAO/ID-83-2)
Greater Emphasis on Early Employment and Better Monitoring Needed in Indochinese Refugee Resettlement Program, (March 1, 1983; GAO/HRD-83-15)

Our work was done in Washington, D.C.; Panama; Costa Rica; Honduras; Mexico; and Geneva, Switzerland from April to November 1983. In Washington, we reviewed legislation relevant to U.S. refugee assistance policy and implementation. We analyzed data from both State and the Agency for International Development (AID), including program and budget documents, reports, and communications with international organizations. We also talked with officials of both agencies and with the UNHCR-Washington Liaison Office officials.

We selected for our work those regional countries where most Central American refugees have sought asylum and assistance and where the host governments and international organizations reportedly provided such asylum and assistance. Among Central American countries, for example, Honduras and Costa Rica have received and assisted the most refugees. There are also, according to UNHCR, up to 120,000 Salvadorans and 40,000 Guatemalans in Mexico.

In Panama, we met with U.S. Embassy and AID officials and reviewed reports on the Salvadoran refugee camp at Ciudad Romero. Fieldwork was conducted in Costa Rica and Honduras where we reviewed mission files and held discussions with U.S. Embassy, AID, and host government (including military) officials, as well as representatives of UNHCR and other international, church, and voluntary organizations. In Costa Rica, we visited the Los Angeles settlement for Salvadoran refugees and the Tiliran camp for Nicaraguan refugees. In Honduras, we visited the El Tesoro camp for Guatemalan refugees, the Salvadoran refugee camps at Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, the Nicaraguan Ladino refugee sites at Jacaleapa and Teopasenti, and the Nicaraguan Miskito Indian refugee settlements in and around Mocoron. In Mexico we held discussions with officials in the U.S. Embassy, UNHCR, and Mexican government. In Geneva we met with U.S. mission to the United Nations and UNHCR officials.

We believe the composite picture presented in this report accurately describes U.S., host country, and international organization assistance to Central American refugees. This review was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

## CHAPTER 2

## CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES: THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Political and economic instability in Central America since the late 1970's caused hundreds of thousands of people to seek asylum in neighboring countries and improved living conditions throughout the region and the United States. Still others remain displaced in their own countries. Estimates of the number of refugees vary depending upon the source, but according to UNHCR, as many as 500,000 Salvadorans and thousands of Guatemalans and Nicaraguans have fled their countries since 1979. As of December 1983, UNHCR reported that about 322,000 of them were refugees. At that time, Central American governments, the Mexican government, and the international community were providing asylum, care, and protection for only about 87,500. (See app. I.) The remainder were dispersed throughout Central American countries, Mexico, and the United States seeking a livelihood outside organized refugee assistance programs.

### CAUSES AND MAGNITUDE OF REFUGEE FLOWS

Central America's current refugee crisis stems from the political and economic events there during the past 20 years. In the early 1960's the expansion and diversification of the agricultural sector and the development of the manufacturing sector helped improve the economic conditions in Central America. The creation of the Central American Common Market enhanced economic development by providing a regional market for trade and encouraging economic integration among the member countries.

In the early to mid 1970's a series of economic and political developments caused drastic changes in Central America. The 1969 border war between Honduras and El Salvador created political tensions in the region which tore at the seams of the Common Market alliance and hampered regional trade and integration progress. The eventual breakdown of the Common Market contributed to slower economic growth rates throughout the region. Social discontent and opposition to the governments increased, and groups throughout the region demanded changes in the political and economic systems. Throughout the 1970's, increasing opposition to the governments led to armed resistance movements, primarily in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

#### El Salvador

El Salvador, with a population of 4.5 million to 5 million, is the smallest but most densely populated country in Central America. The country has an illiteracy rate of about 60 percent and its unemployment rate ranges between 40 and 50 percent. Agriculture is the country's main source of revenue, though most

agricultural land is controlled by a wealthy few. These socioeconomic conditions caused many Salvadorans to migrate over the years. By the mid 1960's, more than 300,000 had reportedly resettled in Honduras. Social tensions caused by the increasing number of Salvadorans in Honduras developed into a border war known as the 1969 "Soccer War" between the two countries. The Honduras government forced most of the Salvadorans to leave the country.

Deteriorating socioeconomic conditions were the primary reason for many Salvadorans migrating initially, but political violence and insurgent activity in the past few years have caused others to leave. The military junta leaders who came into power in 1979 recognized the need for change and promised land reform and a more equitable distribution of resources. Demands for reform also came from guerilla forces and violence throughout the country became widespread after 1980. The fighting continues and has claimed over 35,000 lives. Extremes of wealth and poverty, civil strife, violence, disruptions of services, and an overall deterioration of the economy prompted hundreds of thousands to flee the country since 1979.[1] The Department of State reports that as many as 400,000 others are displaced and homeless in El Salvador.

Guatemala

Increasing violence and worsening economic and political conditions over the past 3 years caused Guatemala to become a major refugee-generating country. In the late 1970's the economy of the 7.5 million Guatemalans began to falter. Inflation is now high and about 35 percent of the population is unemployed.

Increasing violence has caused many people to flee the country. In the fall of 1981, Guatemalan government forces stepped up their drive in the northwest part of the country against guerilla groups trying to overthrow the government. Continued fighting combined with government policies have forced as many as 40,000 Guatemalans to flee into the Chiapas area of Mexico. A small group of farm families also went south to Honduras fleeing religious persecution. While the Guatemalan government formally stated that it would welcome the return of these refugees, few have chosen to return home.

According to State and international organization reports, an additional 100,000 to 500,000 persons are estimated to be displaced within the country.

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[1]The Department of State reports that as many as 750,000 Salvadorans have left their country for economic reasons and that as many as 500,000 of them have come to the United States to seek better jobs.

## Nicaragua

The 1978 and 1979 civil war in Nicaragua, ending in the downfall of the Somoza regime, caused over 100,000 people to flee to Costa Rica, Honduras, and the United States. Half a million more in this country of 2.5 million people were left homeless. By 1980, many of the refugees had returned from neighboring countries, though an estimated 40,000 were still living in Honduras, Costa Rica, and the United States.

In 1981, Nicaraguans again began fleeing their country's deteriorating economic and political conditions. The civil war left the country virtually bankrupt, and economic recovery has been slow. The inflation rate continues near 25 percent, while the unemployment reportedly affects about 30 percent of the population. These problems, along with continued fighting between government and guerilla forces, principally in the north central region of the country and to a lesser extent in the southern region, continue generating refugees. In the past 2 years, as a result of attempted forced resettlement and integration by the government, more than 15,000 Miskito Indians have sought asylum in Honduras' eastern province. Thousands of Spanish-speaking Ladinos have also left Nicaragua for Honduras, and thousands more have fled into Costa Rica.

## ASYLUM IN CENTRAL AMERICA-- INCONSISTENT AND GENERALLY RESTRICTIVE COUNTRY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Common heritage, language, and culture among the people in the region and the relatively small number of people seeking asylum before 1960 made it easier for Central American countries to grant asylum to political refugees. The practice of granting asylum was further bound by a series of treaties: the Havana Convention on Asylum (1928), the Montevideo Convention on Political Asylum (1933), and the Conventions on Diplomatic Asylum and Territorial Asylum (1954). The ensuing large refugee flows initiated by the Cuban exodus in the 1960s severely strained the ability and willingness of countries to continue providing asylum and assistance to refugees.

Economic and political problems in the asylum countries of Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico are causing the governments to reduce assistance provided refugees and to discourage them from resettling. In 1981, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that Latin American countries had followed the tradition of granting asylum but that events during the past 10 years have caused many to discontinue their "open door" asylum policies. Causes of this shift include the larger number of people seeking asylum, greater levels of assistance required by refugees, perceived political threat of some refugee groups, inadequacy of asylum country laws to deal with mass asylum situations, and generally poor economic conditions in the region. As opposed to the traditional political exiles

who were few in number and generally educated, recent refugees are arriving in large groups, lack education and job skills, and require increased material and resettlement assistance.

All the countries are experiencing serious economic difficulties which hamper their participation in assistance programs. The agriculture sectors, historically the motor for economic growth, have been hard hit by the worldwide economic recession and the resulting drop in export prices for their raw materials and primary export products. Regionally, unemployment and inflation rates remain high and foreign debts keep growing. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, in the past 3 years, all the traditional asylum countries have experienced decreasing real rates of domestic growth and increasing external public debts. Prospect for near-term economic recovery in the region are not promising. As a result, few of these countries have the financial resources to provide for their own citizens, much less refugees.

Central American countries continue to provide refugees asylum and some assistance but rarely do they allow refugees to resettle and work in the country. Generally, these countries adhere to many of the internationally accepted standards of treatment of refugees,[2] and there have been few cases of involuntary repatriation. However, governments' refugee policies are inconsistent, resulting in major differences in the extent of assistance provided and the rights and freedoms granted refugees. These differences are making it difficult for the international organizations which assist refugees to find lasting solutions--either becoming self-sufficient, resettling in the asylum country or a third country, or repatriating.

Honduras

According to UNHCR, Honduras provides asylum to 4 major refugee groups from 3 neighboring countries: between 19,000 and 21,000 Nicaraguan Miskito Indians and Ladinos, about 18,000 Salvadorans, and about 1,000 Guatemalans. The majority of these refugees are receiving assistance provided entirely by the international community.

The Honduran government grants asylum and generally is hospitable toward refugees but does not officially grant them refugee status. While it has not signed the U.N. Convention and Protocol, it does permit UNHCR to determine who is eligible for refugee assistance. Officially, the government does not allow refugees freedom of movement, the right to work, or the possibility of spontaneously integrating into the society. While these

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[2]These standards are outlined in the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of 31 January 1967, hereafter referred to as the Convention and Protocol.

restrictions have been lifted for most of the Nicaraguan refugees, the strained relations with the Government of El Salvador prevent the Honduran government from officially being more receptive to all refugees. Honduran officials said the government would agree to "conditionally" sign the U.N. accords dealing with refugees' status and rights. According to the Honduran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government will agree to most of the conditions in the Convention and Protocol but will not agree to grant refugees (1) freedom of movement, (2) the right to seek employment, and (3) naturalization. UNHCR officials are considering allowing the Honduran government to sign the accords with these restrictions.

Salvadorans and Guatemalans are kept in closed camps under the control and protection of the country's armed forces but under the administration of UNHCR. The government, through a multi-department commission, has indicated its willingness to allow the refugees to remain in the camps receiving international assistance until a lasting solution can be found. The government further emphasized that these refugees will not be allowed to permanently resettle in Honduras and that they will be expected to return home when fighting in their homeland subsides.

The government welcomes the Nicaraguan Miskito Indians. These refugees are being resettled in the underdeveloped, sparsely inhabited, and disputed northeastern province of Gracias a Dios. While the government has not officially stated that they will be allowed to stay indefinitely, the government sees the refugees as a vehicle to bring the area productively into the Honduran economy. The government also provides them rights denied the Salvadorans--freedom to move, work, and resettle.

Honduran government policy toward the Nicaraguan Spanish-speaking Ladinos is a mixture of policies toward the other refugee groups in the country. While they are not officially offered permanent resettlement opportunities or freedom of movement, they are not kept in closed camps nor is their travel restricted. While they are not given work permits, they are also not discouraged from seeking work.

The country continues to support international refugee assistance programs. Aside from providing some land for the camps, direct assistance to refugees is limited to medical and educational support.

Costa Rica

UNHCR reports that there are now over 16,000 refugees in Costa Rica, including 10,000 from El Salvador. These figures, however, do not include all Central Americans--estimated by the

Costa Rican government to be more than 200,000--who are living in the country but are undocumented and are not receiving assistance. Aside from free schooling and medical care provided by the government, assistance for documented refugees is paid for by UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Costa Rica has one of the most liberal asylum policies of all countries in the region. As a signatory to the U.N. Convention and Protocol, the government generally allows refugees to resettle there. Those officially recognized as refugees under Costa Rican law receive all the social benefits and privileges accorded its citizens--including free schooling and medical care. Like in Honduras, however, few refugees are given work permits; rather they are encouraged to participate in self-help programs where they become self-employed in producing goods that do not compete with local markets. Except for the Nicaraguans at Tilaran, refugees are also allowed freedom of movement within the country. According to government officials, the location of the Tilaran camp to a nearby hydroelectric plant makes the camp unsuitable as a permanent site and at present, refugee movement in and out of the camp is restricted.

Mexico

Reportedly the largest number of refugees are in Mexico. Since 1982 UNHCR has continuously reported as many as 120,000 Salvadorans in Mexico, though their status and location are uncertain. About 3,500 of them received limited assistance prior to 1983. The government of Mexico and UNHCR also are assisting between 35,000 and 40,000 Guatemalan Indians along the southern Mexican border.

The government has neither agreed to the U.N. accords relating to refugees nor allowed private or church organizations to assist refugees. The government also has not permitted international oversight of the assistance programs. While officially stating that there are no refugees in the country, the government continues to receive and accept UNHCR funds to assist Guatemalans in the southeastern part of the country. Also, while the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico are reportedly receiving some assistance, the Salvadorans, no longer considered refugees by the government, are not. The extent and effectiveness of assistance and protection provided the Guatemalans was not reported by either the Mexican government or UNHCR.

Other countries

Nicaragua is now the home for about 17,500 refugees who fled the conditions in El Salvador. In 1983, 4,000 reportedly returned to El Salvador and another 3,500 moved to Costa Rica. According to UNHCR, the Nicaraguan government provides refugees with basic assistance and residency status. It also allows refugees to work and treats them like Nicaraguan citizens. In 1983 UNHCR estimated it directly assisted 2,400 of these refugees.

According to UNHCR, there are also upwards of 70,000 Salvadorans in Guatemala. Neither the government of Guatemala nor UNHCR have any programs to assist these refugees.

## U.S. ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES

The Department of State has the primary authority and responsibility for administering U.S. refugee assistance programs. In Central America, like in other parts of the world, State provides material assistance to refugees almost exclusively through international organizations, primarily UNHCR. U.S. food assistance is normally channeled through the World Food Program--an international program to distribute food for the needy worldwide. The United States offers little direct assistance to refugees in Central America.

The Bureau for Refugee Programs in State is responsible for managing U.S. interests in refugee assistance and promoting solutions to refugee problems. The Bureau is further responsible for ensuring that U.S.-funded refugee assistance and resettlement programs are effectively planned, programmed, and monitored. The major goals of the Bureau emphasize using diplomatic channels to eliminate the causes of refugee flows and support the principle of the international response to refugee problems by placing maximum responsibility on international organizations--primarily UNHCR. According to the Bureau, the United States, as a major donor to UNHCR, has responsibility

> "to press for programmatic and operational improvements in this organization so that it can meet the basic needs of refugees for protection, food, shelter and medical care while other more lasting solutions to their plight are being worked out."

Throughout our review, we noted that Refugee Bureau officials continuously evaluated and monitored refugee conditions and assistance programs in Central America and remained in close contact with the UNHCR representatives.

Generally, the United States contributes about 30 percent of the total budget for UNHCR refugee programs. Since 1982, the United States has funded about one third of UNHCR programs in Latin America. The U.S. share for fiscal year 1982 (excluding food assistance) totaled $8.2 million. The United States initially committed $5 million in fiscal year 1983 but because of increasing program costs--due largely to increasing numbers of refugees--and a greater need for assistance, State reprogramed $6 million more. Fiscal year 1984 commitments have remained at about $11 million.

World Food Program assistance for refugees in Honduras and Costa Rica was about $600,000 and $1.14 million in fiscal years

1982 and 1983, respectively. Some 25 U.S. and Central American church groups and other voluntary agencies provided another undetermined amount of assistance. In addition, State and AID jointly programed $20 million in 1984 for displaced persons in El Salvador and Guatemala. That U.S. assistance to displaced persons, however, was not part of the international refugee program.

U.S. Latin American Refugee Assistance
Fiscal Years 1982 - 1984

| Category | FY 1982 | FY 1983 | FY 1984 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (thousands) | | |
| UNHCR | $8,200 | $11,000 | $11,000 |
| World Food Program | 600 | 1,140 | (unknown) |
| Total | $8,800 | $12,140 | $11,000 |

UNHCR REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

As previously noted, UNHCR provides various types of assistance to refugees, including (1) emergency relief, (2) longer-term care, and efforts to make refugees self-sufficient. Emergency relief is provided to meet refugees' basic necessities such as food, potable water, shelter (often tents), blankets, clothing, and medical supplies. Once emergencies have ceased, refugees often continue to require food, adequate sources of water, shelter and medical facilities, and schools. This ongoing care and maintenance has historically represented the major portion of UNHCR's assistance budget. UNHCR generally subcontracts their program responsibilities to local government entities, church groups, or voluntary agencies. UNHCR officials emphasize that their role is to coordinate assistance programs rather than manage and implement them.

During the ongoing assistance phase, UNHCR, in conjunction with the asylum country government, tries to make refugees self-sufficient, thereby reducing their burden on the host country and the international community. For example, food production, a component of self-sufficiency, is encouraged. This requires that refugees have adequate land to farm, seeds to sow, tools for tilling and harvesting, and technical assistance. In addition, some refugees are assisted in other income-generating projects.

UNHCR's preferred solution to refugee problems (though the most difficult to achieve) is voluntary repatriation. Refugees generally prefer not to return to their homelands until the conditions which caused their flight have either been significantly altered or eliminated. When refugees refuse to return home for fear of persecution (or other reasons), UNHCR continues to provide assistance or attempts to resettle them in the countries where they first sought asylum or in a third country.

In seeking resettlement solutions, UNHCR has determined that its obligation to refugees has been satisfied by providing assistance (usually within a camp or settlement) until they become self-sufficient and are nor longer a serious drain on asylum country resources. After achieving basic levels of self-sufficiency, UNHCR terminates its assistance and prefers to leave the task of economic and social integration of refugees to other U.N. agencies or other donors.

Since the current refugee situations in Central America began, most of UNHCR's assistance has consisted of ongoing care of refugees. In the absence of immediate opportunities for repatriation or third country resettlement, UNHCR plans to assist refugees through local integration and self-sufficiency projects. Since 1981, UNHCR assistance in Central American and Mexico has doubled from $12.5 million in calender year 1981 to about $25 million planned for 1984.

## CHAPTER 3

## REGIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND ASYLUM LIMITED, BUT SOME REFUGEE CONDITIONS IMPROVING

Refugee assistance programs in Central America improved in 1983 due primarily to

--improved working relationships between UNHCR and the asylum country governments,

--increased commitments by UNHCR to resolve refugee problems, and

--continued U.S. and international community diplomatic and financial support for refugee programs.

During our visits to refugee camps and settlements in Costa Rica and Honduras, we found that the extent of emergency relief and ongoing care provided generally met those refugees' basic needs. UNHCR efforts have also resulted in improved protection of refugees in these countries. In Honduras, where such protection has historically been a problem for Salvadorans and Guatemalans, few incidents of refugee mistreatment were reported in the past year.

While conditions at refugee camps and settlements are improving, asylum country policies and program restrictions continue to limit the overall effectiveness of such assistance and protection efforts. Furthermore, political instability and civil strife in refugee countries of origin makes repatriation most difficult. These restrictions make it difficult to find lasting solutions to refugee problems.

### HONDURAS--REFUGEES' NEEDS MET UNDER VARYING CONDITIONS

Living conditions and the extent of international assistance and government support for the four major refugee groups in Honduras vary greatly. The 13,000 Nicaraguan Miskito Indians in eastern Honduras are being permanently resettled and are becoming self-sufficient. UNHCR's plan to phase out assistance to them is generally on schedule. The over 18,000 encamped Salvadoran and 460 Guatemalan refugees receive sufficient food and shelter. They are, however, denied freedom to leave the camps and to seek employment, and the lack of sufficient farm land prevents their becoming agriculturally self-sufficient. Of the estimated 8,000 Nicaraguan Ladino refugees in southern Honduras, only 2,500 are receiving assistance. In contrast to Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, the Ladinos' living conditions are poor--overcrowded housing and inadequate health care--but they are allowed to move freely throughout the country and employment restrictions are not enforced.

UNHCR provides all these refugees ongoing care until they can find a lasting solution to their plight. Currently, resettling the Miskito Indians in Honduras is the only program in the region for which an end of assistance is in sight for UNHCR, the asylum country, and the donors.

Before March 1983, a multitude of problems hindered assistance efforts which were directed by the UNHCR regional office in San Jose, Costa Rica. Some of the problems contributed to strained working relationships between UNHCR, international donors, and the Honduran government. The regionally managed program was criticized by the Costa Rican government and the United States for its lack of planning and high costs. As a result, in April 1983, the San Jose office was relieved of its responsibility for the Honduras program and the UNHCR representative in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, began reporting directly to UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva. By assuming a more direct and operational (versus coordinating) role in providing assistance to refugees, UNHCR's assistance programs have improved noticeably.

## Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees-- basic needs met but camps confining and their locations troublesome

The approximately 18,000 Salvadoran refugees at the Colomoncagua/San Antonio and Mesa Grande camps and the 460 Guatemalan refugees at the El Tesoro camp were receiving sufficient food and shelter and their medical and other basic needs were being met. The assistance workers at the camps confirmed that refugees received better nutrition and health care than the local population.[1] Also they received training in local crafts and actively participated in self-help, agricultural and workshop programs.

These refugees, however, were confined to the camps and could not transport their crafts to local markets. They also could not become agriculturally self-sufficient because of the lack of sufficient arable land. These closed camps contributed to social problems among the refugees, especially those who had been there for extended periods and for whom no near-term solutions to their problems were evident.

UNHCR assumed an active coordinating role in the Salvadoran camps in 1982 and appears to have established an effective organizational structure to meet refugees' basic and longer term needs. A permanent UNHCR staff is responsible for overall program coordination and refugee protection. In addition, UNHCR

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[1]UNHCR officials acknowledged that, contrary to UNHCR goals, refugees in the camps are receiving more material and health assistance than most of the local population. They note, however, that current assistance levels are justified to compensate for camp restrictions which greatly reduce refugees overall quality of life.

contracted with three nongovernmental agencies--the Catholic Episcopal Conference (CARITAS), the Mennonite Church, and the Catholic Relief Service--to operate social, technical, and workshop programs, respectively. A French agency, Medecines Sans Frontieres, assists CARITAS in managing the health and sanitation programs, while some local agencies assist with the nutrition centers and operating the water and agriculture projects. Refugees were being trained in woodworking, shoemaking, tin-smithing, sewing, and hammock-weaving workshops to reduce their dependency and to prepare them to return home.

The proximity of the camps to the Salvadoran border made ensuring the protection and security of the refugees difficult. Since the large number of Salvadoran refugees began entering Honduras in 1980 and 1981, the border remained a highly insecure area. Refugees in these camps lived in constant fear of camp raids. According to U.S. and international officials, incursions, harassment, and even killings were common.

By the end of 1981, the continued violence caused UNHCR, in conjunction with the Honduran government, to initiate a relocation program to move the 12,000 refugees from La Virtud and Guarita camps further inland to a new camp, Mesa Grande. Only 7,000 chose to move; the remaining refugees returned to El Salvador or went elsewhere. Mesa Grande was designed to be a restricted rural resettlement for up to 2,500 refugees, but the new arrivals extended the camp's population to over 10,000. The Guarita and La Virtud facilities were converted to border reception centers for new refugees.

Before establishing Mesa Grande, voluntary agencies working in the area charged the Honduran government with repressing the refugees and undermining the authority of the UNHCR. Since then UNHCR increased its staff, conducted special seminars with the Honduran army on the treatment of refugees, and generally improved its relations with the government. As a result, since mid-1983, serious incidents between the army and the refugees have been virtually eliminated at the camps.

Efforts by the Honduran government and UNHCR to relocate camps further inland continue. UNHCR estimates the cost of moving the 2 major camps to be nearly $13 million. However, UNHCR does not want to relocate the refugees to another "Mesa Grande" because of the high moving costs and because refugees will remain restricted. Further, the refugees themselves do not want to move, fearing Honduran authorities and believing that relocation further inland would not improve their living conditions. UNHCR officials told us that prerequisites for such moves now include provisions for greater freedom of movement and access to markets for refugees and more land. These conditions met, the refugees could become agriculturally self-sufficient, thereby reducing overall assistance costs and justifying the initial moving costs.

After 2 years of negotiations between the Honduran government and UNHCR, little progress has been made in finding acceptable relocation sites. The government continues to restrict movement and employment opportunities for these refugees and, as noted in chapter 2, conditions its signing of the U.N. Convention and Protocol on maintaining these restrictions. As a result, lifting of such restrictions appears unlikely and prospects are not good for the near-term relocation of these camps.

The 460 Guatemalans at El Tesoro camp--5 miles from the Guatemala border--are confronted with problems similar to those of the Salvadoran refugees. Their physical needs are generally met, but they are housed in a small closed camp (about 30 acres) with no freedom of movement or access to local markets. Sufficient arable land is not available for them to cultivate and thereby become self-sufficient. Their basic needs continue to be provided by international and voluntary organizations. The government and UNHCR desire to relocate the camp away from the border but, as with the Salvadoran camps, the near-term prospects are dim for obtaining sufficient arable land and lifting the existing restrictions on refugees.

We observed the living conditions at the camp to be good compared with local Honduran standards. The refugees received sufficient food and their shelter, education, and health facilities seemed adequate. They participated in small projects and attended classes in making shoes and tin and wood products. We observed no major nutrition or health problems.

Confinement to the very small El Tesoro camp is contributing to social problems among the refugees. Reports of fighting among the refugees were increasing, and UNHCR officials were concerned that the relatively stable conditions within the camp would not continue indefinitely. We believe that, like the Salvadorans, the movement of the Guatemalan refugees to a similar closed camp further inland will not solve their problems.

Assistance scheme for Nicaraguan Ladino refugees is no longer adequate

At the time of our visit, UNHCR, through the Honduran Red Cross, was assisting about 2,000 Nicaraguan Ladino refugees near the southern border town of Danli.[2] Another 6,000 Ladinos in the area were not receiving assistance. The assisted Ladinos were placed in rented houses in two villages. Their living conditions seemed worse than those of the other refugee groups in

[2]As of December 1983, the number of Ladino refugees seeking assistance had increased to about 2,500 and was increasing at the rate of 200 per month. UNHCR was attempting to obtain land to resettle the refugees in the area. Due to funding problems, however, prospects for obtaining it were unclear.

Honduras. This situation stems, in part, from their more recent arrival in Honduras, UNHCR delays in providing assistance, limited available housing, and problems experienced by the local operating agency.

The refugees began arriving in Honduras in May 1982, malnourished and with high incidents of disease, mainly tuberculosis and internal parasites. While UNHCR took 5 months to determine refugee eligibility, these problems persisted. Unsanitary and highly overcrowded conditions (average 34 persons to a small 2-bedroom house) made it difficult to improve health conditions. Initially CARITAS provided the Ladinos emergency assistance, while UNHCR officials debated whether these people were true refugees eligible for UNHCR assistance. In October 1982, UNHCR concluded that the Ladinos warranted assistance and in December, with the government's consent, agreed to use the Honduran Red Cross to manage the assistance program.

With UNHCR funds, the Red Cross began renting houses, providing logistical support to voluntary workers, and overseeing the health facilities. Beds, furnishings, and clothing were made by the refugees in carpentry and tailor shops in the towns. For the Red Cross, CARITAS manages the education and social programs and the storage and distribution of incoming World Food Program food.

The refugee housing in both villages has been exhausted, according to UNHCR officials. The extreme overcrowding and the continued influx of refugees into the villages are creating social problems. Both the Honduran government and UNHCR recognize the need for an alternate housing scheme to meet current and future refugee flows into the area. The Honduran government, however, has been reluctant to provide sufficient arable land in the province for a new resettlement site. According to government officials, because of existing poor economic conditions in the area and the lack of suitable land, attempts to assist and provide land for refugees will cause serious domestic problems. Furthermore, neither UNHCR nor the government have been able to agree on who will pay for and own land.

According to State and UNHCR officials, the local Red Cross has not effectively managed or coordinated the program. The agency was unorganized and its volunteers were inexperienced for the task. The health and sanitation conditions deteriorated due to a lack of full-time doctors, and food distribution was erratic and uncontrolled. Reportedly, adult refugees were selling some children's supplementary food rations. More recently, a UNHCR program evaluation criticized the CARITAS staff and their inability to manage food distribution.

Responding to a UNHCR recommendation, in 1983 Medecines Sans Frontieres assumed full responsibility for health and sanitation services in the area and assigned a doctor and two nurses to assist the refugees in the two towns. They have since established health and nutrition centers and started a supplementary feeding program for the malnourished children. In com-

menting on our draft report, State considered these changes in the past 6 months as significant program improvements and noted that while problems remain, the direction of the program is positive.

Nicaraguan Miskito Indian resettlement programs generally on schedule

The local resettlement of the Nicaraguan Miskito Indian refugees in Mosquitia--the easternmost province of Honduras--is progressing well. Though the initial response by UNHCR was slow, impressive progress has been made in the past year. The Honduran government's positive response and policy toward the development of the area contributed to successful assistance and resettlement.

Nicaraguan Miskitos, along with a few Suma and Rama Indians (hereafter referred to as Miskitos), began entering Honduras in 1981 when their Nicaraguan villages were destroyed by the Sandinista forces. By 1983, more than 13,000 Miskitos had sought refuge in the area and 10,000 of them were housed in and around the village of Mocoron. The others settled spontaneously in other parts of the region, which is sparsely populated by about 20,000 Honduran Miskitos.

UNHCR moved most of the Miskito refugees from Mocoron in January and February 1983 and began a 3-year program to permanently resettle them in isolated rural villages. World Relief--a private voluntary agency--manages the overall program, and other agencies, including Medicenes Sans Frontieres, the Peace Corps, Save the Children, CARE, and the World Food Program, are contributing to the effort. There are 90 workers in the villages, including 70 from the voluntary agencies.

The UNHCR resettlement program calls for refugees to be agriculturally self-sufficient after their first two crop cycles and for food distribution to be systematically phased out. Though much of the first rice crop was lost to flooding, officials anticipate that most of the refugees will achieve self-sufficiency by the end of this period. They plan to stop providing assistance in 1984 as the Miskitos reach self-sufficiency.

While the remoteness and harshness of the region creates logistical and health problems, generally the refugees are receiving adequate material assistance and the resettlement program is progressing on schedule. The Honduran government allows the refugees unrestricted freedom of movement, provides them land (use, but not title), and unofficially accepts their full and permanent integration into the region. World Relief also established an integrated education program with the local population, which will eventually be managed by the Honduran government. UNHCR plans to completely phase out its relief program by the end of 1984. World Relief, through a project funded by an AID grant, then plans to continue providing

development assistance in education, health, and agriculture for the entire region.

## COSTA RICA--REFUGEE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND LOCAL INTEGRATION NOT NEAR

Increasing economic problems in Costa Rica are contributing to the government limiting assistance and job opportunities to refugees. Salvadorans in the UNHCR-designed "model" refugee village of Los Angeles appear well cared for but are not becoming self-sufficient. The Nicaraguans confined in the small Tilaran camp are also being well cared for but have no opportunity to attain self-sufficiency in this temporary facility. UNHCR and Costa Rican efforts to help another 6,500 refugees in the urban areas to become self-sufficient were limited.

Estimates of the number of documented and undocumented refugees in Costa Rica are unverified. At the time of our visit in September 1983, UNHCR reported that over 16,000 documented refugees were in Costa Rica--more than half receiving assistance. About 15,000 were living in and around the capital city of San Jose and, of these, 10,000 are believed to be Salvadorans. An additional 1,000 Salvadorans and Nicaraguans were in camps in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

According to government officials, 200,000 more migrants were undocumented and were spontaneously integrating into the local economy. Only limited information is available on their location and status. In an attempt to better manage assistance programs, the government encourages these people to identify themselves to local authorities.

Refugee assistance programs, including those at the three rural camps and work projects in the urban San Jose valley, are financed almost entirely by UNHCR[3] and are managed by the Costa Rican government's Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social. In September 1983, about 7,550 of the over 16,000 documented refugees were being assisted by UNHCR--6,500 in the urban areas and 1,000 in the camps.

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[3]According to State, The Intergovernmental Committee for Migration provided $450,000 in 1982-83 to assist refugees. The Costa Rican government provides refugees with free education and health services.

Refugees in Costa Rica

| Location | Total | Assisted by UNHCR |
|---|---|---|
| San Jose/urban areas | 15,000 | 6,500 |
| Camps: | | |
| Los Angeles | 380 | 380 |
| Tilaran | 500[a] | 500[a] |
| Limon | 150[a] | 150[a] |
| Total | 16,030 | 7,530 |

[a]By April 1984, the number of Nicaraguan refugees at Tilaran and Limon settlements had increased to over 4,000.

Most of the UNHCR assistance was for ongoing care, although some refugees were receiving help to integrate into the local economy. The extent of international assistance, coupled with the government's social services (provided to all persons in the country), affords refugees living conditions equal to or better than those of much of the local population. Providing protection for refugees has not been a problem.

Economic difficulties in the country, the loss of jobs to the large number of undocumented immigrants, and the notion that assistance is being provided the Salvadorans and other refugees has created negative reactions toward refugees and increased social tensions in Costa Rica. As a result, the government placed new restrictions on refugees' entry into the country, employment, and eligibility for assistance. Even though UNHCR is financing programs to help refugees integrate, the government does not allow refugees to be employed in occupations that compete with local residents.

## Urban self-sufficiency programs for Salvadoran refugees are limited

UNHCR provides ongoing care for about 6,500 of the urban refugees in the San Jose valley in central Costa Rica. In 1982 and 1983, through its implementing agency, CARITAS, about 800 of these were helped to start small self-sufficiency enterprises. The program offered up to 6 months of technical and financial assistance in developing income-generating businesses and trades, such as clothing, furniture, printing, handicrafts, and toys. UNHCR believes that when these refugees become self-sufficient, it can phase out its assistance for basic care and maintenance. According to UNHCR, it plans to provide similar assistance in 1984 to about 1,500 refugees.

The assisted refugees did not become self-sufficient during the initial programmed period and, as a result, UNHCR cannot phase out its ongoing assistance. Only about 12 enterprises can be considered viable. UNHCR officials recognize that the efforts in this field have been only partially successful and

have had only a limited effect on the overall refugee situation. According to UNHCR, problems have included (1) the local implementing agencies' difficulties in managing complex integration activities and (2) existing government employment restrictions limiting opportunities for refugees to effectively integrate.

## Refugees at settlements not becoming self-sufficient

Assistance programs at the two major refugee camps in Costa Rica, though meeting refugee material and health needs, were not enabling refugees to become self-sufficient. Also, the assistance provided Salvadorans at the Los Angeles settlement is extensive and costly. Nicaraguan refugees at the Tilaran camp continue to be in a state of transition, and plans for their relocation to the southern border are not materializing.

### Los Angeles--costly "model" settlement should not be repeated

The rural settlement of Los Angeles was designed to accommodate a maximum of 1,000 refugees, and an adjacent reception center was to handle up to 1,000 more. At the time of our visit, about 400 refugees were at the settlement. Under a November 1980 agreement between the government of Costa Rica, the local Red Cross, and UNHCR, the Red Cross was to manage the project which was intended to make the refugees self sufficient by mid-1983 and the settlement a model for other refugee programs. To achieve this goal, UNHCR bought the land, financed construction of facilities, and started several industries at the farm-like settlement, including a cattle ranch with 50 head of cattle, a modern pig farm, a rabbit farm, and two chicken farms--one each for eggs and poultry. Handicraft shops were also started. The settlement also includes individual prefabricated houses, schools, dining halls, a church, a child care center, a general store, and a clinic.

The "model" settlement has not worked and has been severely criticized. For example, an August 1982 report by a group of government officials from Central American countries involved in agriculture and refugee programs concluded that the approach taken for this settlement should be abandoned. The report noted that poor planning contributed to its high cost, especially for housing construction and unnecessary infrastructure. Detailed soil surveys and land evaluations on the potential productivity of the hilly and rocky terrain were not conducted. These problems, along with the shortage of agricultural labor--most of the Salvadorans were children and elderly people--impeded reaching the desired levels of production. To overcome these and other problems, in November 1982, the Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social assumed full responsibility for managing the project.

Costa Rican and U.S. officials also have questioned the project's high costs. The $6,000 per capita cost to construct the village and associated projects represents the most expensive refugee project UNHCR has supported worldwide. An official of the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture told us in May 1983 that cost analyses of the industries at the settlement were needed to determine which are efficient and profitable. Such analyses have not been done.

In September 1983, we observed that many of these problems continued to impede refugee self-sufficiency. The pig and chicken farms were operating but were not self-supporting. The number of cattle was down to 25 head--many had recently been stolen. Furthermore, even if the soil were of good quality, only about 20 percent of the settlement's population was of the age and ability to farm productively. Also, the hilly and rocky lay of the land, we were told, was not suitable for effective production. UNHCR officials agreed that prospects for refugees becoming self-sufficient in the near term were not good and that UNHCR would need to continue providing care and maintenance assistance to the Salvadorans at the Los Angeles settlement.

Tilaran--alternative locations sought

The Tilaran refugee camp was established and continues to serve as a temporary facility--a transit center for Nicaraguan refugees. Having previously housed construction workers at the nearby hydroelectric dam and plant, the barracks-like buildings can accommodate up to 1,500 refugees. At the time of our September 1983 visit, there were 600 Nicaraguans at the camp. Nearly half had entered during the previous 2 weeks. By mid-November, however, we learned that the influx of Nicaraguans had greatly surpassed the facility's capacity.

The refugees are not permitted to leave the camp and, except for a small garden project, UNHCR provides all their food, clothing, and shelter. We found the living conditions at the camp to be adequate; it was clean and well organized and had few health problems.

For national security reasons and to plan for long-term refugee needs, efforts have been under way to resettle these refugees to southern Costa Rica near the Panama border. These efforts have not been successful due to the absence of an acceptable replacement site and unresolved disputes on who will pay for the land and how assistance will be shared with the local population. However, until a new location is found and the land bought, the Nicaraguan refugees will continue to depend almost entirely on the international community for support.

MEXICO--GOVERNMENT POLICIES SERIOUSLY LIMITING ASSISTANCE EFFORTS

Recent government of Mexico policy changes toward refugees and other migrants--especially Salvadorans and Guatemalans--

have seriously hindered prospects for effectively assisting them. Oversight of UNHCR-funded government-run assistance programs for Guatemalan refugees is almost nonexistent. UNHCR representatives have been granted only restricted access to the refugee camps in the Chiapas region. Further, the absence of more dependable estimates of the number of Salvadoran refugees in the country precludes any realistic assistance planning by UNHCR. As a result, these and future Salvadoran refugees can expect little, if any, assistance or economic opportunities in Mexico and many will be forced to seek opportunities elsewhere. U.S. and Mexican officials recognize that the majority of Salvadorans have sought, and continue to seek, such opportunities mainly in the United States.

## Government policies are becoming increasingly restrictive

The Mexican government does not agree with the U.N. standards for refugees and has not signed the Convention and Protocol. Furthermore, in the last 3 years the government's policies and programs for refugees have become increasingly restrictive. For example, since 1982, funding of refugee assistance programs has decreased as shown on the next page:

| Calendar year | Amount |
|---|---|
| 1982 | $1,800,000 |
| 1983 | 180,000 |
| 1984 | 55,000 (estimated) |

With the 1983 change in administrations came more changes in Mexico's attitude toward refugees and other migrants. The previous Coordinator of the Mexican Refugee Commission was replaced by the Director-General of the Migration Services, who is concerned primarily with preventing migrants from entering the country.[4]

Economic conditions in the country are severe, and the present influx of refugees is creating problems for the new administration. The government is reluctant to provide much assistance or any resettlement opportunities to migrants when underemployment and unemployment affect 40 percent of its population. Also, some government officials are concerned about the political problems associated with assisting refugees from neighboring countries. Furthermore, the government does not have the legal means to deal with refugees as a formally recognized group. Salvadorans and Guatemalans are considered

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[4]In commenting on a draft of this report, State said that the Director of Immigration was recently relieved of his duties as head of the Mexican Refugee Commission and replaced by a career diplomat. Since then, State officials have been given permission to visit the camps in Chiapas.

"temporary residents," since Mexico does not allow them to remain for extended periods. We were told by the Assistant Secretary of Government as well as the new Coordinator of the Refugee Commission, that "there are no refugees in Mexico," rather there are illegal or undocumented migrants.

Neither State nor UNHCR has assessed recently the conditions of the Guatemalan refugees (or undocumented migrants in Mexico). With UNHCR having restricted access to the Guatemalan settlements in the Chiapas region, the initial attempts by U.S. officials in 1983 to travel to that area of southern Mexico were prohibited by the Mexican government. More recently, in January 1984, State officials were allowed into the area but only for a limited and selective visit.

Extent of assistance for Guatemalan refugees unknown due to restricted access to settlements

Mexican government policies made it virtually impossible to accurately determine if refugees are being adequately assisted and protected. Although UNHCR plans to provide up to $6 million in 1984 to assist and protect the Guatemalan refugees, the Mexican government has allowed neither UNHCR nor U.S. officials unrestricted access to the settlements. Therefore, the Government's use of UNHCR assistance funds could not be fully assessed. In January 1984, after repeated requests by U.S. government officials for permission to visit the settlements in the Chiapas region, the Mexican government granted U.S. officials clearance to visit a few of the settlements.

In mid-1981, an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Guatemalans crossed into the Chiapas area in southeast Mexico and were quickly deported. Thereafter, UNHCR began providing assistance to Guatemalan refugees through the Mexico Refugee Commission.In 1982, about 20,000 refugees were in the area and received UNHCR-funded emergency assistance from the government agency. By April 1984, State reported that the number of refugees had grown to nearly 40,000. They now live in over 80 settlements along the Mexico-Guatemala border. According to UNHCR, a high percentage of these refugees are women and children who arrived in poor condition and are living in a state of extreme deprivation. Malaria, gastro-enteritis, and tuberculosis are common among them, and many suffer from malnutrition and anemia.

According to State and UNHCR reports, logistics is the primary assistance problem. The settlements are in an inhospitable area reached only by mules, boats, or small planes. Some settlements are several days travel from the nearest town. Because of their locations, security at the settlements also remains a problem. Some of the settlements are within a mile of the Guatemalan border. According to recent reports, about 68 raids into the camps in the past 2 years have left as many as 20 refugees dead. Commenting on our draft of this report in March 1984, State noted that there have been no significant incidents of incursions into the camps over the past several months.

UNHCR and U.S. officials' restricted access to the settlements and the limited oversight of assistance programs has prompted some State officials to propose a reduction of U.S. funds for UNHCR's assistance program in Mexico. UNHCR officials say this response may prove counterproductive since they believe the Mexican government would like to see all assistance to Guatemalan refugees discontinued. They believe a cut-off of funds could only reduce assistance and justify further government restrictions on assistance and international access to the settlements.

## Salvadoran refugees--thousands unassisted

Since 1982 UNHCR has continuously reported that 120,000 Salvadoran refugees were in Mexico. The majority were believed to be young and mobile and to be from semi-urban areas of El Salvador. Only about 3,500 were permitted to resettle in Mexico although such opportunities and other assistance was discontinued in 1983. Furthermore, the Mexican government does not allow voluntary organizations and/or church groups to assist refugees. According to U.S. and Mexican officials, most of the Salvadorans transit through Mexico and enter the United States illegally.

While in Mexico the Salvadorans must provide documented proof of employment to prevent their deportation. However, with unemployment and underemployment in Mexico near 40 percent, employment opportunities there for Salvadorans are virtually nonexistent. In 1982, UNHCR tried to implement various income-generating activities for a few hundred Salvadorans in Mexico City, including small-scale trade and handicraft to integrate families into the local economy. Hampered by the worsening economic conditions in Mexico, the government has discontinued all assistance to Salvadorans.

Estimates of the number of Salvadorans in Mexico represent "guesses" and UNHCR has not tried to validate or update these estimates. Mexican officials acknowledged that they do not have good estimates and, as one official noted, "We cannot determine the number of Salvadorans in Mexico any more than the U.S. can determine the number in the United States." The Department of State estimates that there are only 12,000 Salvadorans in Mexico.

UNHCR officials told us that their estimates of 120,000 Salvadorans in Mexico were provided by the host government, were unverifiable, and were therefore unofficial. Such estimates, however, are contained in official UNHCR publications--unqualified as to their source and authenticity. Furthermore, the estimates of Salvadorans in Mexico have not been verified or updated since 1982, even though they have been repeatedly questioned by the United States and others. We believe that if UNHCR publishes such estimates, efforts should be made to assess their accuracy and utility.

## CONCLUSIONS

UNHCR and asylum governments' programs to assist refugees in camps and settlements in Honduras and Costa Rica are adequately meeting refugees' needs. Programs to make refugees self-sufficient and efforts to find lasting solutions to their problems, however, have been less successful. Central American countries and the international community generally are willing to assist refugees, but individual government policies result in greatly varied and inconsistent levels of material assistance and few resettlement opportunities. Ongoing political and economic difficulties in the region could continue generating refugees and may lead to further asylum government restrictions on assistance and resettlement opportunities.

Because of Mexican government policies restricting U.S. and international access to refugee settlements, we were unable to accurately determine if refugees were adequately assisted and protected. While reports of poor living conditions, disease and malnutrition among the Guatemalan refugees continue, serious economic difficulties, including high domestic unemployment, has resulted in a general reluctance on the part of the Mexican government to provide much assistance or resettlement opportunities to these refugees.

Refugees in Central America continue to place political and economic strains on asylum governments which are already hard pressed to provide much assistance or economic opportunities. In hopes of reducing the impact of refugees on the local population, asylum governments have provided some land to be used by refugees for temporary, and usually restricted settlements. In only a few instances are refugees provided permanent resettlement opportunities and allowed to integrate into the local economies.

UNHCR organization and program changes since 1982 have improved assistance and protection programs throughout the region. As a result, living conditions for some refugees have also improved. Some projects, however, have not achieved their objectives. The Los Angeles settlement in Costa Rica, for example, is now recognized by UNHCR and others as an ineffective approach to achieving refugee self-sufficiency.

Repatriation and third country resettlement for Salvadoran refugees will not happen soon. In addition, Honduran government policies toward Salvadorans, including confining them to small closed camps and restricting their employment and movement, are making it difficult for UNHCR to promote other resettlement solutions. We agree with UNHCR that unless movement and employment restrictions on the Salvadoran refugees at Colomoncagua/San Antonio and Mesa Grande are eased, and unless additional farmland is provided at new sites, movement of the camps will not result in long-term resettlement solutions. We recognize the political importance of the Honduran government acceding to the

U.N. Convention and Protocol. However, if UNHCR allows the Honduran government to condition the signing of these accords on maintaining its movement and employment restrictions, such action may sanction the government's limited efforts to ease such restrictions and subsequent attempts to relocate the camps.

## AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO EVALUATION

In commenting on a draft of this report, State noted that regional refugee assistance programs were improving and that the total number of refugees assisted has remained stable over the past several months. State commented that all refugees who have sought UNHCR assistance in the region have received it and that current assistance programs will minimize the possibilities of continued migration outside the region. State also believes that the tradition of hospitality and asylum continues to be viable in Central America but is directly dependent on the willingness of the international community to bear the cost of assistance. (See app. III.) We agree with State that UNHCR has not turned away persons requesting assistance. However, UNHCR reports that large numbers of persons they consider to be refugees are not receiving assistance in the region, including thousands of Salvadorans in Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Further, the Salvadorans in Honduras are provided only restricted asylum. Our work also shows that the extent of resettlement opportunities and assistance in the region is currently insufficient due, in part, to the large number of refugees and other migrants, and asylum countries' serious economic difficulties and policies.

State also noted that the lack of economic opportunities in the region is probably the major factor that encourages employment seekers to migrate to the United States. (See app. III.) We agree with State that for those persons whose primary reason for emigrating is the search for employment, the lack of regional opportunities will encourage their flight to the United States. For others, however, we believe the lack of regional refuge and assistance may encourage such flight.

Referring to our observation about Honduran government restrictions on Salvadoran refugees, the Department of State commented that the U.S. government and UNHCR have fully endorsed the Honduran government's December 1983 plan to relocate the refugees further inland. State commented that the relocation plans are well advanced and that the new site will permit greater security, possibilities for food self-sufficiency, and freedom of movement for the refugees (see app. III). UNHCR officials confirmed that they continue to support efforts to establish the refugee camps away from the border but said the Honduran government had not agreed to ease existing restrictions on the refugees and specific conditions for the new camps have not been established. For example, as of April 1984, there were no agreements on such matters as who will pay for the land needed for the new camp sites or provide for the security of the

refugees, how refugees will be cared for, the extent of freedom of movement they will receive, or the refugees' access to local markets. The UNHCR believes that such conditions must be addressed in a final agreement document.

## CHAPTER 4

## FLOW AND IMPACT OF CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Most official sources generally agree that since 1980, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans have fled their country for neighboring Central American countries, Mexico, and the United States. The conditions causing them to flee still exist. Hundreds of thousands more are said to be displaced and living in refugee-like conditions in El Salvador and Guatemala. Continued violence and civil strife there could cause more to flee and become refugees.

UNHCR officials acknowledge that the future for Salvadorans in other Central American countries and Mexico appears bleak. As previously noted, only about 28,000 are being assisted in Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. None receive assistance in Guatemala or Mexico. U.S. and Mexican government and private officials working in the immigration and refugee fields generally agree that a large number of the unassisted Salvadorans have migrated or are migrating toward the United States. Restricted asylum, resettlement, and assistance opportunities throughout the region for Salvadorans may cause more of them to move toward the United States in search of such opportunities and improved economic conditions. In commenting on our draft report, State said that the lack of economic opportunities either at home or within the region is probably the major cause of Salvadorans migrating to the United States.

This chapter discusses the (1) link between the current resettlement and assistance opportunities offered Salvadorans in Central America and Mexico and their future migration to the United States, (2) potential economic and social impact on the United States of such migratory flows, and (3) U.S. plans for controlling large-scale immigration.

### FUTURE RESETTLEMENT AND ASSISTANCE FOR SALVADORANS IN HONDURAS SEEMS LIMITED

For Salvadoran refugees, asylum in Honduras means living in small closed camps with restricted freedom of movement and limited opportunities to work. According to State officials, the confining camps have, by design, acted as a deterrent for new refugees.

UNHCR officials believe that accommodating more refugees at the Colomoncagua/San Antonio and Mesa Grande camps would be difficult. New refugees' housing needs could be met only by using some of the land now under cultivation which would reduce overall agriculture production at the camps. New settlement sites for Salvadorans are proving hard to find. Due to the historical

animosity toward Salvadorans and the belief that added assistance will encourage new refugee flows, the Honduran government has been slow in providing resettlement opportunities for new refugees. Government officials cite the scarcity of land as the primary constraint for accommodating future refugees.

## CONTINUED FIGHTING IN NICARAGUA PREVENTING SALVADORANS FROM FINDING REFUGE THERE AND IN COSTA RICA

The flow of refugees from El Salvador into Nicaragua and Costa Rica has stopped in the past year. The fighting in Nicaragua is causing many of those who sought refuge there between 1980 and 1982 to leave the country. In 1982, UNHCR estimated that there were 22,000 Salvadoran refugees in Nicaragua with 100 new arrivals monthly. In 1983, their numbers were down to 17,500. According to State, this decrease was due to the voluntary return of the refugees to El Salvador or their migration to Costa Rica.

The traditional overland route of Salvadorans migrating to Costa Rica (through Honduras and Nicaragua) has been closed due to the continued civil strife in Nicaragua. Constant skirmishes between government and antigovernment forces caused the Nicaraguan government to close its border with Honduras. According to UNHCR officials, the closed border makes it virtually impossible to reach Costa Rica by land and, as a result, the number of Salvadorans seeking refuge there has stabilized in the past year. They do not expect any increases as long as the northern border remains closed. State officials also confirmed that during 1983 virtually all the new refugees entering Costa Rica were Nicaraguans.

## SALVADORANS AND OTHER CENTRAL AMERICANS CONTINUE TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES ILLEGALLY

The Salvadorans and other Central Americans continue their attempts to enter the United States illegally according to INS and Border Patrol officials. Furthermore, many officials forecast that continued strife in the region will likely cause the number of people fleeing Central America to increase.

The numbers of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua traveling across neighboring countries and through Mexico into the United States are subject to dispute. The extent and resulting impact of their continuing migration are also not clear. According to the INS, however, Salvadorans represent the largest number of non-Mexican illegal aliens entering the United States. In a March 1983 report, the Congressional Research Service stated that

> "By most estimates, several thousands of Salvadoreans currently arrive in the United

States undocumented, continuing a pattern of illegal migration that has existed for a number of years. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service currently apprehends over 1,000 undocumented Salvadoreans monthly, but the agency believes that this may reflect only about one fourth of the total entries."

The rate of apprehensions at the United States-Mexico border has since increased. For example, in the first 9 months of fiscal year 1983, INS apprehended an average of about 1461 illegal Salvadorans monthly. Though the number of undocumented Salvadorans residing in the United States is unknown, official estimates ranged from 100,000 to 500,000.

Guatemalans also are believed to represent a large portion of the total number of Central Americans migrating to the United States. In 1981 and 1982, the INS apprehended an average of 340 illegal Guatemalans monthly. In the first 9 months of fiscal year 1983, INS apprehended an average of over 400 illegal Guatemalans monthly.

Information on those that enter the United States (i.e. age, sex, marital status, educational background) is scarce but, according to State and INS statistics, some general observations have been made about the Salvadorans. A 1983 State Department survey of Salvadorans that fled toward the United States revealed that most were young single males with few technical skills. Most left El Salvador unemployed and had few political affiliations. INS data on Salvadorans apprehended and detained at California's El Centro Detention Center in September 1983 also shows that an overwhelming majority were young (around 20 to 30 years of age) single males. INS officials also confirmed that many came with few technical skills.

## IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON THE UNITED STATES REMAINS UNCLEAR

Limited assistance and restrictive resettlement opportunities for refugees and migrants in Central America and Mexico may promote their continued migration to the United States. The potential economic and social impact of large numbers of refugees or illegal immigrants from Central America on the United States is unclear. Their impact will depend on numerous economic and social factors for which little, if any, reliable data is now available.

A general consensus among public and private officials in the field, however, is that their impact will depend largely on the legal status and rights given these people by the U.S. government. Such a determination, they say, may be driven by the number of Central American migrants, their arrival schedule, and the locations at which they seek to enter and resettle. If the migrants' arrival is sudden and massive and is concentrated

at a few locations--similar to the Cuban/Haitian boatlift to south Florida in 1980--the U.S. government may consider giving them a legal status, i.e., as entrants. However, if they come across the border in a continuous, steady, and more controllable flow into various states, the U.S. government could maintain its current policy to declare them illegal immigrants and thereby not provide them assistance or resettlement opportunities.

Resettlement costs for refugees and entrants have been high

Historically, the costs of assisting and resettling refugees or entrants in the United States have been high and have included public cash assistance and expenses for education, health care, and other social services. The assistance and resettlement costs for Salvadorans entering the United States as refugees or migrants also could be high.

The United States admitted a total of 256,549 refugees in 1981 and 1982--mostly from Southeast Asia. A recent Office of the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs study determined that in fiscal years 1981 and 1982, federal, state and local governments spent (1) about $3 billion to process, receive, and assist many of these refugees and (2) over $830 million to resettle 125,314 Cuban and 7,200 Haitian entrants in the United States. A similar study done by a private organization--the Federation for American Immigration Reform--estimated the 2-year costs for providing for these entrants to be at least $1.18 billion.

The public sector's costs for resettling refugees and entrants were borne primarily by the federal government though in 1981 and 1982, state and local governments spent about $546 million, mostly for education.

The greatest federal resettlement expenses were for cash (including Aid for Families with Dependent Children and Supplemental Security Income) and medical assistance (including Medicaid). In 1982, for example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reimbursed states over $450 million to cover their cash assistance payments and $296 million for their medical assistance costs. These amounts represented 75 percent of the $993.9 million the Department spent to assist refugees (primarily Indochinese) and entrants.

Social services, including orientation programs, translation, English language and vocational training, employment counseling, and job placement, are also costly. In fiscal year 1982, the Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement reimbursed the states over $67 million for these and other social services necessary to resettle refugees.

In testimony before the House Judiciary Committee in June 1983, a State of Florida official highlighted some of the

effects that Cuban and Haitian entrants had on the Dade County school system.

> "To provide an appropriate program which will meet the refugee students' educational, psychological and adjustment needs and which will provide appropriate classroom space and transportation to and from school for eligible students, the Dade County Public Schools has estimated it will nave to expend more than 17 million dollars in the 1983-84 school year. This includes funds for special programs such as English for speakers of other languages and basic skills and curriculum content instruction in home languages, as well as the services of bilingual counselors, psychologists, visiting teachers and other support personnel."

In commenting on the draft of this report, the Department of Justice cited as other "significant" resettlement and social expenses the costs of detaining certain illegal entrants in federal criminal facilities. Also, referring to this section of that draft, HHS commented that we were silent concerning offsetting contributions of the refugee population to the American economy and noted that the annual tax payments of refugees who have been in the United States an average of 5 years "equal more than one-sixth of the annual cost of the refugee resettlement program."

## Impact of illegal aliens in the United States not quantified

While reports on specific refugee resettlement programs are available and federal, state and local budget data can be summarized, sufficient data has not been compiled to accurately quantify the full domestic impact of undocumented, or illegal, Central America immigrants in the United States. Furthermore, authorities disagree about their domestic impact. There is also a scarcity of data on their number and socioeconomic characteristics. As a result, assessments of their impact have been, and continue to be subjective.

### Economic problems

Large numbers of illegal aliens can have a wide ranging impact on the United States. Unlike refugees and entrants, illegal aliens do not present formal resettlement costs. Nevertheless, their presence has been noted in communities where they compete for jobs; use existing health care and public education facilities; and in some cases, create social tensions. A GAO report, entitled Illegal Aliens: Estimating their Impact on the United States (PAD-80-22, Mar. 14, 1980), noted that based on available studies:

--Illegal aliens are employed in low-skilled and unskilled jobs that most legal workers may be unwilling to take.

--A substantial number of illegal aliens receive less than the minimum wage.

--A small percent of all illegal aliens receive federal social services, although they pay federal income and social security taxes.

--Certain urban centers and the Southwest are mostly affected by the unique social, economic, and environmental circumstances due to the concentration of illegal migrants and/or their proximity to the border.

In a 1981 report, the United States Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy also said that there is no consensus among researchers about the extent to which illegal aliens (1) use social services, (2) displace American workers, (3) depress wages, or (4) affect U.S. law and society. Although the Commission could not quantify the impact, it recognized that:

"Some U.S. citizens and resident aliens who can least afford it are hurt by competition for jobs and housing and a reduction of wages and standards at the workplace. The existence of a fugitive underground class is unhealthy for society as a whole and may contribute to ethnic tensions. In addition, widespread illegality erodes confidence in the law generally, and immigration law specifically, while being unfair to those who seek to immigrate legally."

Illegal aliens affect mostly state and local governments which must provide everyone with health care and public education. In June 1982 testimony before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, a California representative of the National Association of Counties reported that at local hospitals

"Seven percent of the inpatient case load and 8% of the outpatient case load are found to be illegal aliens, amounting to $2.3 million in bad debts for this fiscal year. These bad debts account for half the hospital's total bad debts. During this year, 563 illegal aliens have been admitted, at an average cost per stay of $3,736."

Illegal aliens also place a strain on public school systems. In Washington, D.C., for example, the approximately 1,600 children of illegal Salvadorans enrolled in the public schools

in 1983 created a need for an additional $700,000 in the city's Spanish language bilingual education budget.

Potential social problems

Some U.S. government and private officials have warned that regardless of their legal status, Central Americans could cause social tensions in some of the communities where they settle, especially with the existing minority populations. In 1983, the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs reported to the Congress that refugees ". . . may be seen as detrimental by low-income groups who compete with refugees for access to scarce resources." The report points out that although the impact of refugees on communities is often minimal and is of limited duration, they can be easy targets for hostility and criticism because of their high visibility.

Officials active in resolving community tensions between refugees and community residents noted that both refugees and illegal immigrants will cause community tension if they compete with existing residents for jobs or housing and that such tension is often heightened by language and cultural differences. In its 1981 Annual Report, the Justice Department's Community Relations Service stated that

> ". . . a major agency concern was the resettlement of refugees and the conflict this often caused. Much of the conflict stemmed from intractable economic issues, such as on. . . disputes (as on Texas' Gulf Coast) between white and Vietnamese fisherman over the last couple of years. But in major metropolitan areas where refugees have increasingly settled, difficulties grew out of the clash of unfamiliar cultures, from language barriers, and, in some instances, out of a direct collision between competing value systems."

The report further said that such confrontations will not quickly subside.

THE UNITED STATES NOT PREPARED TO CONTROL LARGE-SCALE IMMIGRATION

In 1982, the United States completed an emergency plan for dealing with sudden large-scale immigration into the United States. That plan, however, centers on controlling illegal immigration of boat people into southern Florida and has little relationship to controlling illegal immigration across the United States-Mexican border. INS officials are now developing another plan specifically for mass illegal immigration along this border.

In response to the 1980 Cuban/Haitian boatlift, the President directed the Attorney General to oversee and coordinate the government's response to future mass immigration. The Attorney General, with input from civilian and military agencies, established a Mass Immigration Emergency Plan "to insure that the United States government will be prepared to deal promptly and effectively with any sudden, illegal large scale immigration effort . . ." The plan, however, prepared for another mass immigration from Cuba and Haiti to southern Florida without concentration on other areas of the United States. Basically, it calls for aliens that elude interdiction efforts to be taken into custody and then identified and moved to detention centers pending deportation. Those aliens deemed deportable will not be offered resettlement in the United States.

The plan emphasizes needed U.S. efforts to prepare for and interdict persons trying to cross the U.S. borders illegally and identifies tasks required to severely restrict their entry. Implementation of these and other tasks requires participation by the Departments of State, Justice, Health and Human Services, the Treasury, Defense, and Transportation, as well as the General Services Administration and the Office of Management and Budget.

INS recognizes the existing plan's limitations and is developing another plan to respond to an immigration emergency along the United States-Mexican border. In April 1984 the plan was in draft form. Until a mass immigration emergency plan is prepared to deal specifically with large-scale illegal migration across this border, we doubt the government can begin to prepare to handle such flows promptly and effectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

As noted in chapter 1, U.S. Central American refugee policy emphasizes providing assistance and resettlement opportunities for refugees in the region rather than promoting resettlement opportunities for them in the United States. The policy stems from the premise that following their long standing tradition, Central American governments will grant refuge and assistance to asylum seekers. Under this premise, the United States would not need to provide large numbers of them resettlement opportunities here.

Chapter 3 shows, however, that in most Central American countries and Mexico, only a small number of Salvadoran refugees are now receiving assistance and that future resettlement opportunities for them in the region appear virtually nonexistent. Current economic and political conditions in the region continue to cause refugees to migrate to the United States.

U.S. government officials and others must be increasingly concerned with the prospects of large numbers of Central Americans continuously seeking to enter the United States--legally or

illegally. A major difficulty confronting the officials, however, is that the United States does not know, nor does it have means to determine, the number of Central Americans entering this country, or their impact on other Americans. Until a plan is completed, the United States cannot begin to prepare to deal promptly and effectively with such potential large scale migration.

## AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO EVALUATION

In reviewing the draft of this report, the Departments of Justice and HHS were generally concurred with our message and conclusions. We have incorporated new information they provided, as well as other data as appropriate, into the body of this chapter. Particular points expressed in their comments are summarized below.

### Department of Justice

The Department commented that the orderliness and means of arrival of migrants to the United States are not factors in determining refugee status (see app. IV). We agree and have deleted this reference to refugees. However, many experts in the field maintain that a large and uncontrolled influx of migrants had and could continue to influence decisions to offer them status of "entrants" as was offered the Cubans and Haitians in the 1980 boatlift.

The Department also referred to our quoting a prior GAO report to support our "stand that illegal aliens give more to the economy than they receive". The Department went on to mention that "thousands" of aliens apply for benefits in the United States to which they are not entitled and said that illegal employment and opportunities for monetary, medical and social benefits not available in their home countries serve as twin "pull factors" inducing aliens to enter the United States. We have not taken a stand in this, or other reports that illegal aliens give more to the U.S. economy than they receive. We used the information in a previous GAO report to show that while large numbers of illegal aliens adversely impact some U.S. communities, others have a positive impact.

Justice commented that GAO should discuss in the report other factors the agency believes draw aliens to the United States. These include (1) the extent and impact of frivolous and bonafide claims to refugee status and the delays in reaching these determinations, and (2) the growing perception that illegal Central American aliens who are apprehended have little to lose by applying for refugee status. We concur with the Department that there are other push and pull factors which influence the movement of Central Americans to the United States.

Department of Health and Human Services

HHS commented that the draft of this report provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the Central American refugee problem (see app. V). HHS noted, however, that the report "lacks an indepth discussion from a domestic welfare perspective of the potential impact on the United States of these Central American refugees" and should cover (1) the effects of the "underground" resettlement of migrants on local populations and communities, and (2) the needs of the Central American refugees. HHS further noted that the report does not explore the costs and impact of high concentrations of illegal aliens on U.S. communities.

In the "Objectives, Scope, and Methodology" section of this report we point out that the information on the domestic impact of undocumented or illegal aliens was obtained from other reports and data and discussions with agency officials, including from HHS. However, we noted in the draft that "sufficient data has not been compiled to accurately quantify the full domestic impact of undocumented, or illegal, Central American immigrants on the United States", and that assessments of their impact remain subjective. This limited information precluded our making such an indepth analysis.

Other technical comments were incorporated in the body of the report where deemed appropriate.

## ESTIMATES OF CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES
(as of December 1983)

| Refugee-generating countries | Asylum countries | Estimates | | UNHCR-assisted refugees |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | State Dept. | UNHCR | |
| El Salvador | Honduras | 16-20,000 | 19,000 | 17,953 |
| | Costa Rica | 12-13,000 | 10,000 | 8,000 |
| | Mexico | 6-12,000 | 120,000 | - |
| | Nicaragua | 22-24,000 | 17,500 | 2,413 |
| | Guatemala | - | 70,000 | - |
| | Belize | - | 7,000 | 2,000 |
| | Panama | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| | | 57-70,000 | 244,500 | 31,366 |
| Guatemala | Honduras | 460 | 1,000 | 572 |
| | Costa Rica | 5,000 | 300 | 150 |
| | Mexico | 35-40,000 | 40,000 | 36,864 |
| | Nicaragua | - | 500 | 69 |
| | | 40-45,460 | 41,800 | 37,655 |
| Nicaragua | Honduras | 16-20,000 | 19,200 | 15,636 |
| | Costa Rica | 5- 8,000 | 3,154 | 854 |
| | | 21-28,000 | 22,354 | 16,490 |
| Others | Costa Rica | - | 2,700 | 1,000 |
| | Mexico | - | 10,000 | 1,000 |
| | Nicaragua | - | 500 | 6 |
| | | - | 13,200 | 2,006 |
| Total | | 118-143,460[a] | 321,854 | 87,517 |

[a]In April 1984, State Department estimated that there were approximately 150,000 refugees in the region.

APPENDIX II

## UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING REFUGEE STATUS AND AGENCY COMMENTS ON GAO USE OF THE TERM REFUGEE

A refugee is a person who flees his/her home or country, generally during times of war, oppression or persecution, seeking shelter or protection in another country. The status of refugees, including their rights and freedoms, is governed primarily by the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. These two international legal instruments were adopted within the framework of the United Nations and contain provisions defining who is, and who is not, a refugee.

According to Article 1 A (2) of the Convention, the term "refugee" shall apply to any person who

> ". . . owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country. . ."

According to UNHCR, the phrase "well-founded fear of being persecuted" is the key phrase in defining the term refugee. It requires that such persons be forced into flight by fear. The initial cause of the person's flight (the push) rather than the direction taken after such flight (the pull) is the primary factor in determining if the term "refugee" can be applied to that person. Determining that both fear and persecution were the causes for the person's initial flight is subjective and requires taking into account the person's individual and family background, membership of particular racial, religious, national, social or political groups, and an evaluation of their opinions and feelings.

Clear determinations of a person's eligibility for refugee status is difficult and not always practical. The difficulty of making clear determinations in all cases has led UNHCR to consider as refugees some groups of people who have fled their homes, crossed an international border, and are living in refugee-like conditions. UNHCR made group determinations in Central America and considers many of the Guatemalans in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Salvadorans in Mexico, and others as "prima facie" refugees.

Both the Department of State and Justice commented that our general use of the term "refugee" in the draft of this report differed from that found in existing U.S. legislation (Refugee

APPENDIX II

Act of 1980, Public Law 96-212), and was imprecise and misleading. We have clarified in the footnote on page 1 our use of the term "refugee" as referring to those persons considered refugees by UNHCR. However, irrespective of the legal test of a refugee required under U.S. law for immigration purposes, we believe, and the Department of State agrees, that for the purpose of this report, the UNHCR definition is appropriate.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
*Comptroller*
*Washington, D.C. 20520*

APR 10 84

Dear Mr. Conahan:

I am replying to your letter of March 12, 1984, which forwarded copies of the draft report: "Central American Refugees: Regional Conditions and Prospects and Potential Impact on the United States."

The enclosed comments on this report were prepared in the Bureau of Refugee Programs.

We appreciate having had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. If I may be of further assistance, I trust you will let me know.

Sincerely,

Lorin A. Jurvis, Acting

Enclosure:
As stated.

Mr. Frank C. Conahan,
Director,
National Security and
International Affairs Division,
U.S. General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C. 20548

APPENDIX III

"CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES: REGIONAL CONDITIONS AND PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE UNITED STATES"

The following are comments, prepared by the Bureau for Refugee Programs on behalf of the Department of State, on the draft report of the United States General Accounting Office on Central American Refugees (GAO Assignment Code 472022), which was submitted to Secretary of State George P. Shultz by GAO Director Frank C. Conahan on March 12, 1984.

GENERAL

The draft report is, in general, a good overview of the complex set of issues and problems concerning refugee populations in the Central American region. Some of the observations and conclusions have been overtaken by events--which is only to be expected, even over a short period of time, when dealing with evolving situations. This will be reflected in the detailed comments below.

Overall, while many problems remain, refugee assistance programs in the region are being improved through the joint efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), host governments in countries of first asylum, donor governments throughout the international community, and numerous private voluntary organizations (PVO's) which are active in the area. Also, with the exception of continued outflows of Nicaraguan refugees into Honduras and Costa Rica the total number of refugees in the region has remained stable over the past several months. Relief programs for displaced persons are in place in El Salvador, and expected to begin in Guatemala in the near future. It is anticipated that through these programs we will minimize the possibilities of new flows, and that voluntary repatriation will become a viable option for some refugees now receiving assistance in countries of first asylum. In the opinion of the Bureau, the tradition of hospitality and asylum continues to be viable in Central America, although the ability of host countries to continue to offer it will be directly related to the willingness of the international community to bear most of the costs of assistance. The thrust of the GAO report, on the contrary, states that there is a general deterioration in the situation.

This difference in perception flows, in part, from the reports attempt to deal simultaneously with two related, but separate sets of problems: those encountered by refugee groups, and those related to illegal migration. Not only is the basic motivation causing people to leave their own countries different for the two groups, remedies for dealing with them are covered by different legislation and are handled by different agencies, both in the United States and in most other countries. The footnote on the first page of Chapter 1 on the GAO report states that "...the term 'refugee' will be used, unless otherwise noted, when referring to all types of immigrants." This definition of "refugee" is legally unacceptable and imprecise, since it makes it difficult to compare statistics from various sources, and complicates consideration of modalities for dealing with the problems involved. It misses the point that the terms "refugee" and "immigrant" are not interchangeable, and are defined differently in existing U.S. legislation.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

(now p. ii)
Page iv. The best estimates of the Department of State are that there are approximately 150,000 refugees in the region, who are receiving some form of assistance and/or protection from the UNHCR. The key point is that all refugees who have sought assistance from UNHCR have received, or are receiving, it.

(now p. iii)
Page v, ff. The customary nominative and adjectival form for nationals of El Salvador is Salvadoran, not Salvadorean.

(now p. iii)
Page vi, paragraph one. Mexico has permitted the resettlement (spontaneous) of several thousand Salvadorans.

(now p. iii)
Page vi, paragraph two. Assistance has been made available through the UNHCR to all Salvadorans who have sought it. To compare the figure of 31,000 receiving assistance with hundreds of thousands fleeing El Salvador illustrates the danger of equating refugees and migrants.

(now p. v)
Page ix. It is not correct to say that refuge and assistance are not available within the region. Adequate refuge and assistance are available, and is likely to continue to be as long as the international community continues to assist host countries in bearing the financial costs. The factor that encourages illegal flows toward the United States is not the lack of assistance for refugees, but, rather, the lack of economic opportunities in the region for those migrants whose primary reason for emigrating is the search for employment.

(now p. iii)
Page x. In February 1984, the Honduran National Refugee Commission drafted an action plan to relocate Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees from the Western part of the country. The relocation site will be Olanchito in the Yoro Department. The plan calls for the inhabitants of Colomoncagua to be moved this coming June. Relocation of refugees from Mesa Grande, considered to be the best administered camp, is at least a year away.

The relocation plan reflects the undesirability of having refugees close to the border where security cannot be assured. The move will provide more land for the refugees to raise their own crops and opportunities to develop greater self-sufficiency.

The UNHCR has fully endorsed the relocation plan of the Honduran authorities both on grounds of safety and enhanced employment opportunities for the refugees. The U.S.G. also supports the plan.

Page 1. As noted previously the equation of refugees to migrants is unwarranted and confusing. To the list, in paragraph one, of factors causing refugee flows, should be added "conflict between government forces and insurgent groups."

(now p. 1)
Page 2, paragraph one. The reference to young, single men, would probably be more accurate as "young, 'unaccompanied' men," since many have left families at home. Such men act as "anchors" in countries where they settle, causing further flows as their families come to join them.

(now p. 1)
Page 2, paragraph two. To the first sentence, one should delete the redundant adjective "political" in front of refugee and add the phrase, "... refugees, in relatively small numbers, who were mainly educated and from the middle and upper classes."

In the penultimate sentence after "...government supported programs," add the phrase "funded largely by the international community."

The last sentence, again confuses refugees and migrants. Using the word "refugee" obscures the fact that most of those who come to the United States are not the women, children, and older persons who make up the bulk of the refugee groups receiving assistance in the region, but, rather, young, unaccompanied male migrants primarily motivated by a search for jobs.

APPENDIX III



(now p. 2)
Page 4. We suggest the latter half of paragraph two be amended to read:

> As a result, for fiscal year 1984, the U.S. refugee admissions ceiling was reduced to 1,000 (down from 2,000 the previous two years) for refugees from the Latin American and Caribbean region. Until recently, however, no Central Americans had been admitted to the U.S. as refugees in the past three years. In the first half of fiscal year 1984, 93 beneficiaries of the Salvadoran amnesty program were admitted as refugees.

(now p. 4)
Page 7. The UNHCR estimate of 120,000 Salvadoran refugees in Mexico is unsubstantiated. (This reflects the usual practice of the UNHCR of accepting numbers provided them by host governments.)

(now p. 5)
Page 10. In the penultimate sentence, last paragraph, change "...between both countries." to "...between the two countries."

(now p. 6)
Page 11. In the first sentence of paragraph one, change the last phrase to read, "...but political violence and insurgent activity in the past few years have caused others to leave."

(now p. 8)
Page 13, last paragraph. No country has discontinued providing assistance to refugees. As for settlement, first asylum countries in Central America are still among the world's most forthcoming in terms of positive attitudes toward settlement and integration. Some countries, e.g., Nicaragua and Costa Rica may be too quick to offer the settlement option, when it would be preferable to wait a decent interval to test the possibility for voluntary repatriation. Only Mexico has adopted significantly more restrictive policies in recent months, and, even there, it is possible that restrictions may be eased with the appointment of a new head of the Mexican Refugee Commission.

(now p. 8)
Page 14. The first sentence of the last paragraph leaves the erroneous impression that it is the countries of asylum which are providing assistance to the refugees. Without exception, the great bulk of costs for assistance programs is being borne by the international community, not the host governments.

(now p. 8)
Page 15. The entire section, ending on page 15 might well be reworked, since its thrust is subtly skewed. Asylum is alive and well in the region, but given the character and numbers of current refugee populations, all countries of first asylum in the area must have the financial support of the international community to provide the necessary assistance. The new populations are more numerous and less assimilable; hence,

resettlement, where it is a viable option, is rendered more difficult. Unemployment and economic difficulties in the countries of asylum render the problem even more acute--as the report notes. However, Costa Rica has indicated it is ready to resettle Nicaraguans who wish to to so (when and if funding for resettlement projects can be worked out), and Honduras has already permitted de facto resettlement of thousands of Nicaraguan Miskito Indians.

(now p. 8)
Page 16. Paragraph one should be changed to indicate that all refugee groups in Honduras, not merely "the majority" are receiving assistance provided by the international community.

(now p. 10)
Page 18. The last sentence should read, "...refugees are not usually given work permits." FYI: The Costa Rican government has given temporary work permits for some of the Nicaraguan refugees at Tilaran camp to work on the coffee harvest.

(now p. 10)
Page 19. In the last paragraph, it should be noted that limited assistance was being given by the UNHCR to some 3,500 Salvadoran refugees in Mexico up until 1983. This group is now essentially integrated into the Mexican economy and does not need assistance. However, any Salvadoran requesting assistance of UNHCR would, presumably, be given it, if found qualified.

(now p. 11)
Page 22, paragraph one. U.S. contributes to UNHCR programs for Latin America, as a whole, not simply to programs for Central America. Thus, our contributions constitute 30-33% of the total UNHCR budget, rather than 40%. In FY 1984, of a projected UNHCR budget of $32.9 million, we expect to fund $11.0 million, or 33.4%. UNHCR requirements will almost assuredly be higher than the projection, but our funding is not expected to change.

(now p. 12)
Page 22, paragraph two. The program of assistance to displaced persons in El Salvador is a joint State/USAID program, which is expected to total $20.0 million in FY 1984. State expects to fund $7.0 million of program costs. Assistance programs in subsequent fiscal years will be funded exclusively by USAID, probably at the same $20.0 million level for both years.

(now p. 12)
Page 24. Change the last sentence in paragraph one to read:

> When refugees refuse to return home for fear of persecution (or other reasons), the UNHCR continues to offer assistance or attempts to resettle them in the countries where they first sought asylum or in a third country, as appropriate.

(now p. 14)
Page 26. In the third tic in paragraph one, after the word, "U.S.," add the phrase "and international community."

(now p. 14)
Page 27, paragraph one. Add, after the phrase, "while conditions at refugee camps and settlements are improving..." the clause, "political instability and civil violence in countries of origin make the preferred lasting solution of voluntary repatriation most difficult."

(now p. 14)
Page 27, paragraph two (last sentence). Change to read, "... the Ladinos' living conditions had, until recently, been neglected. They lived in overcrowded housing and received inadequate health care." Add new paragraph, "Assistance programs for Nicaraguan Ladinos have shown significant improvement over the past six months, however. Medical programs have been enhanced through the participation of Medecins sans Frontieres; general management of the programs has been enhanced by the services of an expert consultant furnished by LICROSS Headquarters in Panama; and additional land has been acquired for agricultural purposes. Problems remain to be resolved, but the direction is positive."

(now p. 17)
Page 31, first full paragraph. It should be noted that, as concerns current plans for moving the camps from Colomoncagua and San Antonio, it is some of the voluntary agencies who seem to be determined to undermine, or reverse, the joint decision of the UNHCR and the Honduran government to make the move.

(now p. 17)
Page 31, last paragraph. Replace old paragraph with the following. "Plans to move the Salvadoran camps from Colomoncagua and San Antonio, as well as the Guatemalan camp at El Tesoro, to a larger agricultural site in Yoro province are well advanced. The new site will permit greater security for the refugees; greater possibilities for food self sufficiency, and perhaps cash cropping; and greater freedom of movement for the refugees. A UNHCR media release describing these plans is enclosed for GAO information.

(now p. 19)
Page 37. The last sentence on the page should be amended to read:

> They plan to stop providing assistance to those initially resettled in 1984, as the refugee groups reach food self-sufficiency; aid will continue until such time as self-sufficiency is reached and will be available for new arrivals, as well.

(now p. 21)
Page 39. Nicaraguans now being assisted in camps at Tilaran and Limon number almost 4,000 as of April 1984. Efforts to find a more adequate site which would relieve overcrowding are being accelerated. Management of the camps is being turned over to a private voluntary organization, Socorro.

(now p. 21)
Page 40. (last paragraph) Negative reactions within the indigenous population have stemmed from assistance being provided all refugees, not merely Salvadorans.

(now p. 23)
Page 45, last paragraph. Several hundred refugees from the Tilaran camp were given permission to work in this year's coffee harvest, but care is taken not to let the refugees usurp jobs from the local labor force. Given local unemployment levels, this means that the refugees are seldom given permission to work.

(now p. 24)
Page 48, paragraph 1. The Director of Immigration was recently relieved of his duties as head of the Mexican Refugee Commission. He was replaced by a career diplomat, Ambassador Oscar Gonzales. RP Officials from Washington have now been given permission to visit the border camps in Chiapas province (April 2-4, 1984), and it is hoped that this presages less restrictive policies toward refugee affairs than was the case under the previous director. It is too early, however, to make a definitive judgement.

(now p. 25)
Page 50, paragraph 1. The total number of Guatemalan refugees is approaching 40,000.

The last paragraph should note that there have been no significant incidents of incursions into the camps over the past several months.

(now p. 28)
Page 54, last paragraph. The lack of economic opportunities either at home or within the region is probably the major cause of Salvadoran emigration to the United States and should be cited in the list of reasons, rather than "restricted asylum ..." and assistance opportunities." As noted previously asylum and assistance are alive and well for refugees".

(now p. 31)
Pages 57 ff. The problem of illegal immigration into the United States is outside the area of competence of the Bureau for Refugee Affairs. The GAO might wish, therefore, to refer those parts of the report pertaining to this important issue to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for their comments.

James N. Purcell, Jr.
Director
Bureau for Refugee Programs

U.S. Department of Justice



Washington, D.C. 20530

April 23, 1984

Mr. William J. Anderson
Director
General Government Division
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Anderson:

This letter responds to your request to the Attorney General for the comments of the Department of Justice (Department) on your draft report entitled "Central American Refugees: Regional Conditions and Prospects and Potential Impact on the United States."

The draft report has been reviewed by organizational components within the Department concerned with immigration matters. The comments we are providing below are intended to improve certain technical aspects of the report and provide our views on several of the issues related to immigration activities.

The report uses the terms "refugee" and "asylum" in a very broad and general manner, and not in the more restrictive sense used in United States immigration legislation. In the footnote on page 1 of the report, the General Accounting Office (GAO) states ". . . the term 'refugee' will be used, unless otherwise noted, when referring to all types of immigrants." We believe use of the word in this context is misleading, because the word "refugee" has very specific legal meaning for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and other Department of Justice components. Because GAO is another agency of the United States Government, its use of the term "refugee" to group bonafide refugees and applicants for asylum with illegal entrants and economic migrants might well result in a serious adverse political and legal impact that the report writers did not envision. Conceivably, parties striving to change current refugee and asylum procedures could seize upon this language as an official endorsement of blanket refugee status for all nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, or they could cite it as one more example of one branch of Government formulating policy diametrically opposed to the policy of another branch.

(now p. 32)
On page 59, the argument that the orderliness of arrival determines eligibility for refugee status is not true. Eligibility is determined on the basis of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion; not on the means of arrival.

(now p. 33)
On pages 61 and 62 of the report, GAO discusses the public sector's costs for resettling refugees. Another significant cost not included in the calculations of resettlement and social service expenses are the costs resulting from the criminal class aliens who manage to effect entry to the United States. Just the costs of detaining Mariel Cuban criminals in Federal facilities are substantial and should be cited as another example of the expenses that taxpayers must bear.

(now p. 35)
On page 63, GAO quotes one of its earlier reports on illegal aliens to support its stand that illegal aliens give more to the economy than they receive. Through such efforts as INS' program to prevent entitlement fraud, the Department has found that thousands of illegal aliens do apply for benefits to which they are not entitled. Opportunities for illegal employment as well as opportunities to secure monetary, medical, or social services unavailable in their home countries are twin "pull factors" which induce aliens to enter the United States independently of the "push factors" cited.

INS has a considerable backlog of pending asylum requests that in large part come from illegal aliens who cannot establish any other basis to remain in the United States. The report does not discuss either the ratio between frivolous and bonafide claims to refugee status, or how delays in reaching these determinations benefit both types of claimants. Similarly, there is no discussion of the factors drawing aliens to the United States, one being the growing perception that illegal Central American aliens who are apprehended have little to lose by applying for refugee status. These points should be made, as failure to do so might actually serve to encourage the mass influx of Central Americans discussed in the report.

(now p. 37)
On page 68, the report mentions the development of a plan to respond to an immigration emergency along the United States-Mexican border. The Border Patrol has participated in the formulation of a southern border emergency plan which is currently under consideration by INS' senior management staff.

INS' fiscal year 1985 budget request includes the southern border enhancement plan. The resources contained in the request will greatly increase INS' enforcement posture along the border and will give them greater flexibility to address the problems enumerated in the report.

We trust the above comments will be helpful in finalizing your report. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

William D. Van Stavoren
Deputy Assistant Attorney General
for Administration

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

APPENDIX V
Office of Inspector General

APR 23 1984

Mr. Richard L. Fogel
Director, Human Resources
Division
United States General
Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

The Secretary asked that I respond to your request for the Department's comments on your draft report "Central American Refugees: Regional Conditions and Prospects and Potential Impact on the United States." The enclosed comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely yours,

Richard P. Kusserow
Inspector General

Enclosure

## COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ON THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT, "CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES: REGIONAL CONDITIONS AND PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE UNITED STATES"

### GENERAL

The report provides a comprehensive, detailed account of the political circumstances, conditions, and restrictions contributing to the exodus of refugees from Central American countries. It is a dramatic account of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) efforts to contend with a burgeoning refugee population.

We agree, as the report concluded, that the United States can expect a continued flow of undocumented Central American aliens unless substantive changes are achieved from the governments in Central America and Mexico. The report, however, lacks an indepth discussion from a domestic welfare perspective of the potential impact on the United States of these Central American refugees. We believe the report should cover 1) the health, social, and economic effects of this "underground" resettlement on individual United States residents and local communities and 2) the private and public agency emergency needs of the Central American refugees.

The estimates of the numbers of illegal immigrants from Central America that are residing in the United States are not handled consistently. The report shifts from positing that it does not know or have the means of determining the number of Central Americans illegally entering the country to providing in several places estimates from different sources of the numbers and types of illegals already in, or coming into the country.

In discussing the cost of the refugee resettlement program in the United States the report is silent concerning offsetting contributions of the refugee population to the American economy. We have new data, which we would be glad to share with GAO, on the annual income tax payments of refugees after an average of 5 years of United States residency. These payments appear to equal more than one-sixth of the annual cost of the refugee resettlement program.

Finally, the report goes on to say that illegal aliens constitute a needy segment of the population and generate another set of costs for State and local governments. However, the report does not explore the impact of these costs (some of which are for indirect supportive services) on communities having concentrations of illegal aliens.

APPENDIX V

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

(now p. 32)

- Page 58: As the number of undocumented Salvadoreans residing in the United States is unknown, we suggest that GAO include the range of estimates rather than just the high estimate.

(now p. 32)

- Page 59: GAO might wish to consider in its report legislation currently pending in Congress on the illegal immigrant situation.

(now p. 33)

- Page 60: The 7,200 Haitian entrant number appears very low. HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement data for FY 1982 show the number of Haitian entrants at more than 40,000.

(now p. 33)

- Page 60: Suggest that GAO make clear that the study cited (that of the Federation of American Immigration Reform) represents only one point of view.

(now pp. 33 and 34)

- Pages 60-61: In reading these two pages, one easily could be left with the mistaken impression that the dollar figures cited represent United States costs of assistance to Central American/Caribbean refugees only. The costs represent aid for all refugees, the overwhelming portion of which was for Southeast Asian refugees.

(now p. 33)

- Page 60: It is not clear what the $3 billion or $830 million numbers represent. Does the phrase "The United States spent"—mean just the Federal government, all levels of government, or total United States spending including voluntary agency, charity and private donations?

(now p. 33)

- Page 60: What period of time is the $830 million for resettling entrants for—just for 1980, or 1980-81, 1981-82, or 1980-81-82? Is it the cost solely for resettlement, or does it include also domestic (cash and medical, and social services) assistance costs as well? Without knowing the period or composition of the $830 million, it is not possible to say how accurate the figure is.

(now p. 33)

- Page 61: Certain items and figures refer to refugees and entrants, while others deal only with refugees. The cash and medical assistance information is for refugees and entrants, while social services information is about refugees only. Some consistency is needed in this section.

(now p. 34)

- Page 61: GAO quotes a Florida State official regarding entrant impact on the Dade County School System. This is a particularly unusual situation given the high concentration of entrants in Dade County, and is unlikely to be repeated by Central American arrivals due to the dispersal of that population already in the United States. Why make an argument by using the most extreme case?

APPENDIX V

(now p. 34)

- Page 62: For cash assistance the major program that needs to be mentioned is refugee and entrant cash assistance. Whether or not they are refugees/entrants, anyone who qualifies would get AFDC or SSI. However, only if someone is a refugee or entrant does he or she qualify for the special RCA(ECA) benefit.

(now pp. 34 and 35)

- Page 63: GAO cites certain data from a 1980 GAO report. GAO may wish to review more recent studies that show somewhat different trends.

(now p. 40)

- Page 70: Appendix I—State Department Estimates--the subtotal for El Salvador should be 57-70,000 (not 56-70,000).

(now p. 40)

- Page 70: Appendix I—State Department Estimates—the final figure should be 118-143,460 (not 117-143,460).

(now p. 40)

- Page 70: Appendix I—UNHCR Estimate column—Subtotal for Others is misaligned with the other numbers in the column. Also, comma (,) not period (.) between the figures 3 and 2.

(Code 472022)



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